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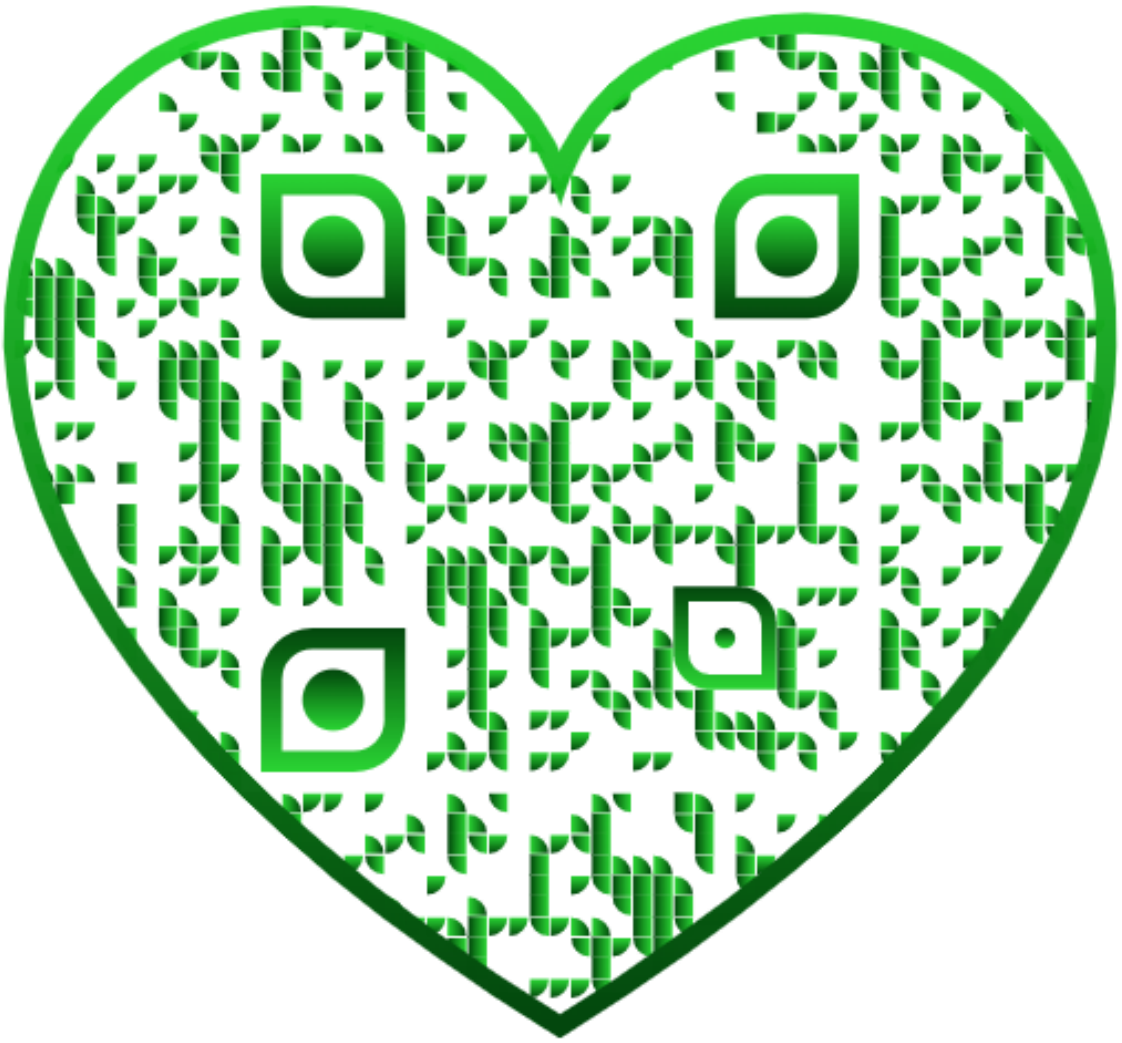

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by Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

With extensive quotes from His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Founder–*Ācārya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

and

A Brahmacārī Reader

Quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda and others especially relevant to *brahmacārīs*
Quotes from His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and His Holiness Hṛdayānanda dāsa Gosvāmī, and from *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta,* are copyrighted by The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc.
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This book features many quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purports, letters, lectures, and conversations. These are all copyrighted by Bhaktivedanta Book Trust—International. Mostly short extracts from these sources have been quoted. Unless otherwise stated, referenced quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, and from later sections of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, are from the purports. To see the complete context in which these statements were made, readers may consult the books, letters, and recorded lectures and conversations of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Dates have been numerically represented according to British usage (i.e., day/month/year; 03/05/72 represents "3rd May, 1972").

Dedication

Dedicated to my lord and master, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the Founder-Ācārya of this wonderful International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. He informed us (all ignorant fools) of the absolute necessity of *brahmacarya*, trained us as *brahmacārīs*, and taught us to go beyond *brahmacarya* to achieve pure love of Kṛṣṇa. The greatest benediction of my life will be to be counted among the atoms in the dust of his lotus feet.

Prayers

oṁ namo bhagavate narasiṁhāya namas tejas-tejase āvir-āvirbhava vajra-nakha vajra-daṁṣṭra karmāśayān randhaya randhaya tamo grasa grasa oṁ svāhā; abhayam abhayam ātmani bhūyiṣṭhā oṁ kṣraum.

"I offer my respectful obeisances unto Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva, the source of all power. O my Lord who possesses nails and teeth just like thunderbolts, kindly vanquish our demon-like desires for fruitive activity in this material world. Please appear in our hearts and drive away our ignorance so that by Your mercy we may become fearless in the struggle for existence in this material world."

Unless one is completely freed of all material desires, which are caused by the dense darkness of ignorance, one cannot fully engage in the devotional service of the Lord. Therefore we should always offer our prayers to Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva, who killed Hiraṇyakaśipu, the personification of material desire. *Hiraṇya* means "gold," and *kaśipu* means "a soft cushion or bed." Materialistic persons always desire to make the body comfortable, and for this they require huge amounts of gold. Thus Hiraṇyakaśipu was the perfect representative of materialistic life. He was therefore the cause of great disturbance to the topmost devotee, Prahlāda Mahārāja, until Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva killed him. Any devotee aspiring to be free of material desires should offer his respectful prayers to Nṛsiṁhadeva as Prahlāda Mahārāja did in this verse. (*SB* 5.18.8 Text and Purport. See also 5.18.10 and 14)

yadi dāsyasi me kāmān
varāṁs tvaṁ varadarṣabha
kāmānāṁ hṛdy asaṁrohaṁ
bhavatas tu vṛṇe varam

"O my Lord, best of the givers of benediction, if You at all want to bestow a desirable benediction upon me, then I pray from Your Lordship that within the core of my heart there be no material desires." (Text SB 7.10.7)

Preface to the First Edition

During the late 60's and 70's, upon the order of his spiritual master, the illustrious empowered preacher His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda brought the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the Western world. At that time most of the world was experiencing an increasing degradation and departure from religious and moral principles. However, Śrīla Prabhupāda gradually introduced a lifestyle hitherto unknown but to a few devoted souls in India: the Vedic culture of austerity for the goal of self-realization. The principles of *brahmacarya* formed an important part of this culture.

Purified and enlivened by following the teachings and practice of *bhakti-yoga* as authoritatively presented by Śrīla Prabhupāda, hundreds of bright-faced young men and women appeared on the streets of towns and villages throughout the world, taking up Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission to fulfill the prediction of Lord Caitanya to spread the holy name of Kṛṣṇa to every corner of the globe. During those years of the expansion of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement under the banner of ISKCON, the reasoning, principles and practice of *brahmacarya* were often taught and heard in and around the increasing number of temples and *āśramas* of the Society. The devotees became stronger in following the principles of *brahmacarya* under the exemplary guidance of the Founder-*Ācārya* of ISKCON, Śrīla Prabhupāda.

There are numerous instructions about *brahmacarya* contained in the large body of literature, lectures, and letters left by Śrīla Prabhupāda, for those diligent enough to study them. However, until now much of the principles and practice of *brahmacarya* has remained an oral tradition within ISKCON. But human lives and memories are short, and many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's young students have now entered other *āśramas,* or left for other spheres of activity. In order that the purity and momentum of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement not be diminished with the passing of time, many devotees feel that this important aspect of the philosophy and application of Kṛṣṇa consciousness should remain easily and frequently accessible to the present and future generations of devotees—in all *āśramas* and statuses.

Therefore it is timely that His Holiness Bhakti Vikāsa Swami has, with the good wishes of many of his godbrother comrades in active preaching, diligently prepared this compendium of the principles and practice of *brahmacārī* life. Bhakti Vikāsa Mahārāja is respected as a staunch practitioner of these spiritual principles. He is dear to the devotees, especially in Eastern India, Bangladesh, and South East Asia, where he has dedicated so many years of his life to

traveling and preaching on behalf of Śrīla Prabhupāda. He is certainly qualified to present this book, and has done a great service by doing so.

This book may accurately be called a "user's guide" to *brahmacārī* life. The first part consists of elaborate discussion of and down-to-earth practical guidance on the many aspects of *brahmacarya.* The second part is a compilation of quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, tapes, and letters about this subject matter.

The importance of this matter should not be underestimated. *Brahmacarya* is the basis of all four *āśramas,* and must be practiced by any man or woman serious and sincere about making tangible progress on the path back to Godhead. *Tapasā brahmacaryeṇa śamena ca damena ca:* "There is no possibility of controlling the mind and senses without following the principles of *brahmacarya.* " Śrīla Prabhupāda lamented the dearth of educational institutions teaching the principles of *brahmacarya* (celibacy), and cited this as one reason for the lack of qualified members of the other three *āśramas.* (*SB* 1.1.10)

We pray that by Śrīla Prabhupāda's mercy this book may help to educate and train the members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement to seriously understand and follow the principles of *brahmacarya,* and thus be pleasing to Śrīla Prabhupāda and beneficial to the devotees and the Society.

We feel fortunate to have met our dear godbrother Bhakti Vikāsa Swami (then Ilāpati Prabhu) just as he was finishing the manuscript of this book and requesting the blessings of the ISKCON Publications Board for its publication, and thus be given the chance to assist in its production. Historically, books which present heavy blows to *māyā* in her work of keeping the fallen souls in illusion have often had to pass through many impediments before finally becoming manifest. We are glad that after passing through a long series of obstacles this book could finally go to press. We beg the forgiveness of the readers for any unintentional errors or lack of quality in the present volume. We pray that the readers may nonetheless reap the full benefit of understanding and determined practice of the principles contained in this book, which may in turn help them to rapidly advance on the path straight back to home, back to Godhead.

Butterworth-Bangkok International Express
27th August, 1988, Appearance Day of Lord Balarāma

The Publisher (Gauḍa-maṇḍala-bhūmi dāsa)

Preface to the Second Edition

It has about eleven years since the first edition of this book came out. Subsequently, it has been re-printed three times in English, and also in Russian, Croatian, Mandarin, Italian, Indonesian, and Portuguese, with a total of about 10,000 copies in print. Although there are not 10,000 *brahmacārīs* in our movement, devotees from all *āśramas* have expressed appreciation of this book, and it continues to be in demand.

Since the first edition was first published, I have been collecting more snippets of information suitable for *brahmacārīs*. This edition is not in essence different from the first, but gives more of the same substance. I pray that devotees may find it helpful in their ongoing journey towards the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.

Dāsānudāsa,
Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

Introduction

Human life, especially the male form, is meant for self-realization: to understand our eternal relationship with God, Kṛṣṇa. This book is meant for men who have seriously taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and especially for those devotees who have joined the *brahmacārī-āśrama* with no training or background in spiritual life.

Brahmacarya means "the life of celibacy." Unfortunately, the very concept of such a lifestyle is still incomprehensible to the vast majority of human society, especially in the Western countries. Indeed, even though the rudiments of Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy—service to God, simple living, high thinking, and so on—may be explained to open-minded persons, the principles of celibacy

and austerity remain an anathema to most. Some even consider celibacy to be dangerous fanaticism or, at best, something unnatural and strange. This book will definitely not be understandable to or appreciated by, nor is it meant for, the common man.

In Kṛṣṇa consciousness we stand apart from the general masses. For all their liberality and free sex, their society is a mess, a hell. We have taken the decision to walk on a different path. We cannot compromise our principles to satisfy misguided persons who have no idea that there is a goal of life, let alone how to attain it. Our goal is Kṛṣṇa, and we are prepared to do whatever is necessary to attain to Him. Why should we descend into the stool pit of material enjoyment? *Brahmacarya* is that training whereby, developing knowledge and detachment *(vairāgya-vidyā),* one becomes immune from the pushing of the senses. Enjoying life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and renunciation, one prepares himself to enter the kingdom of God.

It is not expected that all *brahmacārīs* will remain so without ever marrying. The *brahmacārī* period is traditionally a preparation for what will follow. For most, that means *gṛhastha* life and beyond. Certainly, if a *brahmacārī* is determined and strong then there is no reason why he cannot remain unmarried throughout his life; indeed, some fortunate few will succeed in remaining celibate throughout their entire lives. But the Vedic system prescribes four *āśramas,* and it is understood that most *brahmacārīs* will eventually marry. Yet one's initial training in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is most important. And we must give newly recruited devotees a vision of lifelong commitment to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, whatever their external situation may be. So *brahmacarya* in Kṛṣṇa consciousness shouldn't just mean wearing saffron cloth for a while before getting married ("the waiting room"). It is a serious training program for both the attached, those who intend to marry, and the detached, those who want to remain single throughout their lives. The more strictly we follow, the more benefit we derive.

Of course, *brahmacarya* is not the goal of life—Kṛṣṇa consciousness is. Not simply by accepting *brahmacarya* will one become a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, many already married couples take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and make steady advancement without ever having had *brahmacārī* training.

However, if one is afforded the opportunity for *brahmacārī* training he should eagerly accept it, as it is the best possible start on the long ascent to Vaikuṇṭha. Training and personal guidance are essential, especially for new

and inexperienced devotees. Hence this book is not intended as, nor could it possibly be, a substitute for personal supervision. It can only be auxiliary to such tutelage.

Many classes of devotees may benefit from this book. *Gurukula* students and teachers will find value herein. For despite a boy's *gurukula* education, the present social atmosphere is such that upon attaining puberty, sex desire may well hit him like the in-rushing waves of the sea. How then will he cope? This book will help him.

Herein there is also much valuable information for gurus, *sannyāsīs,* temple leaders, and other senior devotees for whom preaching to and caring for *brahmacārīs* is an important aspect of their service. Certainly every temple president wants to have a team of enthusiastic *brahmacārīs,* for when inspired, *brahmacārīs* render tremendous service.

Gṛhastha men may also derive strength from this book, in preparation for the renunciation that they must ultimately accept as *vānaprasthas* if they actually intend to perfect their lives.

And herein devotee women can learn more about how and why to act cautiously around men. For while the scriptures repeatedly warn men not to be captivated by the charms of women, for women *māyā* appears in the form of man. As long as man and woman are attached to each other for material enjoyment, they remain dangerous to each other.

Gṛhastha couples should be especially aware of their tremendous responsibility to send their sons to be trained as *brahmacārīs,* to be molded as great personalities and thus be saved from a bestial life of sense gratification.

Therefore this book should be read by all classes of devotees, for every genuine devotee must be a *brahmacārī*, i.e., a self-controlled celibate. Indeed, in many instances within this book the word *devotee* could substitute for the word *brahmacārī.*

Of course, simply to read this book and say *Jaya!* will not be good enough, for it is a call to practical action. Although many of the precepts discussed herein are already part of daily life in our ISKCON centers throughout the world, nevertheless to enliven our *brahmacārīs* and to create a strong, healthy mood of *brahmacarya,* constant and sustained input from older devotees is required. Therefore I am hopeful that this book will inspire many senior devotees to start taking a more personal interest in the junior men, thus replenishing their own spiritual lives and those of the entire movement.

I don't claim to be a perfect *brahmacārī*. Writing about high standards is often easier than strictly following them. But Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu wanted to maintain the highest standard, (*Cc.* Antya 2.172) so we should know what that standard is and seriously endeavor to follow it. If we keep the highest standards, sincere people will be impressed by our seriousness. And if we do not keep high standards, then what is the meaning to our being devotees? This book is therefore meant to give an indication of the ideal standard. Obviously, there will be discrepancies in various circumstances and individuals, and it will not always be possible for everyone to attain to the highest level. Those who are *sāra-grahi* Vaiṣṇavas (realists) (*SB* 1.18.7) will accept the essence of the instructions herein and intelligently apply it in their lives, whatever situation they are in.

In this book I have avoided the complex discussion of *varṇāśrama-dharma*, which is now a focus of attention and concern for the intellectuals in our Society. I have simply tried to present practical advice that *brahmacārīs* may apply in their lives. No doubt some will dismiss it as fanaticism. But without one-pointed determination, has anyone ever achieved anything great? To conquer sex desire is no small achievement. Indeed, it is the greatest accomplishment attainable in the material world. A wishy-washy, half-hearted attempt will only lead to frustration. Without being fully dedicated, no one will be successful.

This book is especially meant to help the many sincere young men who join ISKCON, but it should also be relevant and of interest to all devotees serious about improving their spiritual lives. It will hopefully also be appreciated by those *brahmacārīs* who have been in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for some time, who have a basic understanding of this movement and the philosophy yet would appreciate guidance on how best to make further spiritual advancement. And some sections of this book are directed more toward *bhakta* leaders, temple presidents, and other senior devotees. There is ample practical advice herein, plus several sections which philosophically analyze the farce of so-called sexual happiness.

I am known for giving strong advice, and although some devotees reject it as impractical, others appreciate it, apply it in their lives, and thus benefit. My guidance is especially meant for devotees who are serious about advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and are willing to make the sacrifices required to do so. Persons desiring instruction for a compromised style of Kṛṣṇa consciousness

may find it elsewhere. My books are not meant for them.
I have taken up this task also for my much-needed self-purification. Those who know me know that I am still trying to come to the level of a real devotee. Despite lacking full realization, I have made many forceful statements. I hope this will not be considered hypocritical.
Desiring the mercy of all the Vaiṣṇavas,
Yours in the service of Śrīla Prabhupāda,

Bhakti Vikāsa Swami

The Meaning of Brahmacarya

Basically, *brahmacarya* means celibacy.

karmaṇā manasā vācā
sarvāvasthāsu sarvadā
sarvatra maithuna-tyāgo
brahmacaryaṁ pracakṣate

"The vow of *brahmacarya* is meant to help one completely abstain from sex indulgence in work, words, and mind—at all times, under all circumstances and in all places." (-*Yājñavalkya-smṛti*, as quoted in *Bg.* 6.13-14)
There are eight aspects of *brahmacarya*, as described in Śrīdhara Swami's commentary on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.1.12:

smaraṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ keliḥ
prekṣaṇaṁ guhyabhāṣaṇam
saṅkalpo 'dhyavasāyaś ca
kriyā-nirvṛttir eva ca

One should not:

1. Think about women.
2. Speak about sex life.

3. Dally with women.

4. Look lustfully at women.

5. Talk intimately with women.

6. Decide to engage in sexual intercourse.

7. Endeavor for sex life.

8. Engage in sex life. (*SB* 6.1.13 Purport)

One who practices *brahmacarya* is called a *brahmacārī*. In the *varṇāśrama* system, the *brahmacārī-āśrama* is the first of four, namely, *brahmacārī*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha,* and *sannyāsa*.

"According to Vedic principles, the first part of life should be utilized in *brahmacarya* for the development of character and spiritual qualities." (*SB* 3.22.19)

Brahmacarya is thus student life. It was traditionally rigorous, disciplined, and austere. It is a life of cultivation, of preparing for the future. In all *āśramas* devotees are cultivating Kṛṣṇa consciousness, preparing for the examination of death. But the *brahmacārī* period is specifically meant for training: training in how to control the senses and subdue the mind; training to be a *gṛhastha, vānaprastha,* and *sannyāsī*. This training is by submission to, service to, and friendship to the guru. (*SB* 7.12.1)

In terms of *varṇāśrama* principles, the highest standard of *brahmacarya* means the vow not to marry but to observe strict celibacy throughout life. (*SB* 7.12.7) This is called the *bṛhad-vrata* ("great vow"), or *naiṣṭhika-brahmacarya*. "*Naiṣṭhika-brahmacārī* refers to one who never wastes his semen at any time." (*SB* 3.24.20) "The word *mahā-vrata-dharaḥ* indicates a *brahmacārī* who has never fallen down." (*SB* 6.17.8)

In Indian society, *brahmacarya* has often been considered as a set of restrictions aimed at upholding good health and moral principles, with the ultimate purpose of enjoying civilized sense gratification. *Brahmacarya* in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, however, operates on the dynamic principle of knowledge and renunciation fully engaged in the service of God. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "One practicing *brahmacarya* should be completely engaged in the service of the Lord and should not in any way associate with women." (*SB* 4.28.3) According to the definition of *brahmacarya* given in

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (7.12.1), an unmarried person who does not live in the guru's *āśrama,* who has not submitted himself to the rigid life of surrender, and is not directly and exclusively engaged in the service of his guru, cannot properly claim to be a *brahmacārī.*
The broader meaning of *brahmacarya* is *brahme carati iti brahmacarya:* "To act on the spiritual platform."

The Benefits of Bramacarya

āyus tejo balaṁ vīryaṁ
prajñā śrīś ca yaśas tathā
puṇyatā satpriyatvaṁ ca
vardhate brahmacaryayā

"By the practice of brahmacarya, longevity, luster, strength, vigor, knowledge, beauty, fame, piety, and devotion to truth increase." (-Cited from *Practice of Brahmacharya* by Shivananda Swami; original source unknown.)
Practice of *brahmacarya* gives good health, inner strength, peace of mind, fortitude, and long life. It helps to conserve physical and mental energy. It augments memory, will-power, clear thinking, power of concentration, and ability to grasp philosophical subjects. It bestows physical strength, vigor, vitality, courage, boldness, and strength of character. To one who practices *brahmacarya,* divine knowledge comes as if naturally. His words convey meaning and authority, and leave an impression on the hearers.
Conversely, those who do not practice *brahmacarya* must always remain in illusion. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "*Brahmacarya* is very, very essential. When one becomes detestful to sex life, that is the beginning of spiritual life." (Lecture, 4/4/75) "Without becoming *brahmacārī,* nobody can understand spiritual life." (Airport Reception, 18/09/69)

"Brahmacārī" is Also a Designation

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu declared: "I am not a *brāhmaṇa*, a *kṣatriya*, a *vaiśya*, or a *śūdra*. I am not a *brahmacārī*, a *gṛhastha*, a *vānaprastha*, or a *sannyāsī*. I identify myself only as the servant of the servant of Kṛṣṇa, the maintainer of the *gopīs*."(*Cc.* Madhya 13.80) The goal of life is not to be a *brahmacārī*, nor a *gṛhastha*, nor even a *sannyāsī*. It is to be a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda often quoted from the *Nārada-pañcarātra:*

sarvopādhi-vinirmuktaṁ
tat-paratvena nirmalam
hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-
sevanaṁ bhaktir ucyate

"Pure devotional service means being freed from all material designations." "*Brahmacārī*" is also a designation. If we put too much emphasis on making distinctions between *varṇas* and *āśramas*, especially amongst devotees, we are in the bodily concept of life. For, "One cannot realize the Absolute Truth simply by observing celibacy." (*SB* 5.12.12) In India there are Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs* who follow difficult rules and regulations far more strictly than most devotees could even dream of. But they are not dear to Kṛṣṇa.
Caitanya Mahāprabhu would give respect even to Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs*, as was the social etiquette, but He associated only with devotees. When He visited Vārāṇasī, Mahāprabhu avoided the numerous Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs* and chose to live amongst His *gṛhastha* devotees instead—Tapana Miśra, Candraśekhara (a *śūdra* by caste), and the Maharashtrian *brāhmaṇa*. The Māyāvādī *sannyāsīs* were astonished at this and criticized the Lord. Only after He had converted them to Vaiṣṇavism was the Lord pleased to sit amongst them and take *prasāda*. (-See Cc. *Ādi* Chapter 7 and *Madhya* Chapter 25)
In considering a devotee's spiritual advancement, Caitanya Mahāprabhu never considered his external situation. Of His "three and a half" intimate associates, two (Rāmānanda Rāya and Śikhi Māhiti) were householders, "half" (Mādhavī-devī) was an old woman, and one (Svarūpa Dāmodara) was a renunciate who had not even bothered to accept all the external formalities of *sannyāsa*. Many of Lord Caitanya's leading devotees were householders and some were rejects from society. Indeed, Lord Caitanya blessed Haridāsa Ṭhākura (who was born in a Muslim family) to be the *ācārya* of the holy name, just to demonstrate that spiritual advancement is not dependent on being respectable according to *varṇa* and *āśrama* considerations.

So we should not be overly concerned with externals: "I am a *brahmacārī*," "I am a *sannyāsī*." We are all servants of Kṛṣṇa. *Jīvera 'svarūpa' haya—kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'*: "The constitutional position of the living entity is as the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa." (*Cc. Madhya* 20.108) The relative advancement of a Vaiṣṇava is understood only by the quality of his devotion to Kṛṣṇa. *Varṇa* and *āśrama* don't matter. (*Cc. Antya* 4.66-67)

Still, in our present position, *brahmacarya* must be emphasized as an essential part of the means to our end of attaining love of Kṛṣṇa. In our present neophyte position, unless we make a rigid program to control our senses, there will never be any possibility of advancement to higher levels.

"A human being is meant to be trained according to certain principles to revive his original knowledge. Such a methodical life is described as *tapasya*. One can gradually be elevated to the standard of real knowledge, or Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by practicing austerity and celibacy *(brahmacarya)*, by controlling the mind, by controlling the senses, by giving up one's possessions in charity, by being avowedly truthful, by keeping clean, and by practicing *yoga-āsanas*... Unless one is master of his senses, he should not be called Gosvāmī, but *go-dāsa*, servant of the senses. Following in the footsteps of the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, all *svāmīs* and *gosvāmīs* should fully engage in the transcendental loving service of the Lord. As opposed to this, the *go-dāsas* engage in the service of the senses or in the service of the material world. They have no other engagement. Prahlāda Mahārāja has further described the *go-dāsa* as *adānta-go*, which refers to one whose senses are not controlled. An *adānta-go* cannot become a servant of Kṛṣṇa." (NOI, Text 1)

Ādi-rasa

Sex is so overwhelmingly present in the material world that the question must arise, "Where has this sex desire come from?" The answer is that sex originates from God. In the spiritual world, Kṛṣṇa and His consorts are spontaneously attracted to each other and engage in pastimes of love together. This is called *ādi-rasa*, the original and real sex desire, the supermost platform of spiritual exchange. This *ādi-rasa* is free from all material contamination, and is as

different to mundane sex attraction as gold is to iron. (*SB* 5.25.5)
Devotees who are without a trace of any mundane desire and who are situated on the highest platform of spiritual understanding, such as Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Rūpa Gosvāmī, and Rāmānanda Rāya, have appreciated and glorified this *ādi-rasa*. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa Himself accepts the form of Lord Caitanya, adopting the mood of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, just to taste the full sweetness of this *ādi-rasa*.
When this incomprehensibly elevated service mood is perverted and twisted by souls envious of Kṛṣṇa's enjoyment, it comes out as nasty mundane sex desire, which enthralls the conditioned souls and poses an ever-present menace for the aspiring transcendentalist.
Why is it that the *jñānīs* and yogis undergo great austerities, strenuously endeavoring to overcome material desires, but still can only make slow advancement over many lifetimes? Why is it that neophyte devotees, despite chanting and praying to God, are still prone to fall down at any time? It is because of sex desire. The perverted expression of *ādi-rasa* known as mundane sex desire is the main obstacle to spiritual progress.

Mundane Sex Desires

The conditioned soul in the material world is in a state of madness. *Nūnaṁ pramattaḥ kurute vikarma.* (*SB* 5.5.4) Forgetting his eternal, blissful relationship with Kṛṣṇa, he is suffering life after life, being kicked and spat upon by *māyā*. But he is smiling, taking it as enjoyment. Why? Because he is charmed by the glitter of false happiness, beginning with sex pleasure. Sex desire is the main symptom of insanity exhibited by the conditioned soul.
Such foolish beings are always intrigued and charmed by the opposite sex. With the onset of puberty, male youths, especially those who have not been trained otherwise, become overwhelmed by sexual desires. They take every opportunity to mingle with and enter into relationships with the opposite sex. Although they get limited opportunities to do so, their consciousness is always saturated with thoughts of touching the bodies of the opposite sex, seeing their naked forms, and engaging in sexual intercourse. They say "love," but they have only lust.

Even the more sober members of society who are not cultivating gross sexual lust as their main business in life may be captivated by fantasies of enjoying the body of a sexual partner, for the thought of sex is never far away from the mind of a conditioned soul.

But there is nothing intrinsically beautiful about any material body. Even the bodies of beauty queens are simply bags of skin filled with foul-smelling, revolting substances. Blood, mucous, bile, stool, and urine combined as muscles, bones, fat, liver, heart, and intestines—that is what they are having sex with! Sexual happiness is the happiness of uniting the two urine-producing parts. Yet by the mighty power of illusion, an arrangement of skin and flesh overrides all logic and sanity and brings even a person of intelligence down to the level of a dog. As a pig is attracted to a sow, or a male cockroach to a female, so is the sexual desire of a man for a woman. It is not even slightly more elevated than that of the pigs.

There is really nothing special about sex. It is not wonderful, it is not noble, it is not romantic—it is just a bodily function, a response to raw gut feeling. If you think about it soberly, the whole prospect of sex seems rather silly. Still, everybody is doing it. The president of America is doing it, the bums on the street are doing it, the cats and dogs are doing it. Only a few great souls are attempting to conquer over it.

In human society sex desire is expanded into many forms, under the headings of profit, adoration, and distinction. All the trappings of so-called civilization—society, friendship, love, house, cars, clothes, position, power, prestige, money, and so on—are simply for facilitating and expanding this animal instinct called sex desire. But despite its external glamour, unless human society seeks out real beauty, which is Kṛṣṇa, then it has not advanced any more than the pigs or any other animals.

And despite all their emphasis on it, still, as surveys show, many *karmīs* are actually bored at the time of sex. Then why don't they give it up and take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the real nectar of life? Because they know nothing better, don't want to change, and are hoping against hope that sex will make them happy.

Those who are fortunate will take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness for real advancement of life. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is far above the perversions of the gross materialists and the fruitless efforts of the *jñānīs* and yogis. Even a neophyte devotee can be confident of gradually conquering over lust, because

he has got the right method; that is, to revive his natural, real love—his love for Kṛṣṇa. If he sticks to the path, then he will in due course of time achieve full Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Then he will be completely satisfied forever. *Brahmacarya* is meant for developing clear, unsentimental, uncompromising understanding of these points as the basis for making rapid, determined progress in spiritual life.

All the advice given in this book is based on this understanding: sex cannot make us happy; only Kṛṣṇa can make us happy. Devotees who regularly study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books can keep this understanding active in their hearts. Then following all the rules and regulations of spiritual life will come naturally.

Sex—The Cause of Unlimited Suffering

"Of all kinds of suffering and bondage arising from various attachments, none is greater than the suffering and bondage arising from attachment to women and intimate contact with those attached to women." (*SB* 11.14.30)

Because the experience and urges of sex are so intense, and the syndrome of man/woman relationships surrounding it is so complex, it diverts the conditioned soul's attention away from Kṛṣṇa and deludes him more than any other trick of *māyā*. Sometimes the foolish conditioned soul experiences great delight in enjoying sex; at other times he is frustrated and burns in the fire of lust. Or, when spurned by a lover, he suffers mental agony, sometimes so severe that he is driven to kill the loved one, or himself, or both. The loss of a partner to whom one is intimately emotionally attached, by death or other means, leaves the remaining partner with a broken heart. And especially in our most abominably degraded modern society, thousands of people's lives become shattered by having their bodies exploited, either forcefully or tactfully, by others.

The greatest myth in human society is that sex is the cause of happiness and that by adjusting or increasing one's sex life one can find happiness. Factually, the opposite is true: the more one becomes involved in sex, the more he becomes entangled by the complexities of the actions and reactions of material

life. This ultimately leads the unrestricted enjoyer to take birth in the animal kingdom, where he is awarded improved facilities to carry on with his sexual activities, and with minimal restrictions. Birth after birth he can enjoy 8,400,000 varieties of sex to his heart's content. He will also experience varieties of birth, death, old age, and disease. And he will never be happy.
The much advertised pleasure of sex is more fantasized about than real. People assume that sex will bring them pleasure, but the actual act is over in a few minutes and gives far less sensual gratification than was imagined in the mind. In the long run it brings much more trouble than enjoyment.
On the physical platform also, sex is debilitating and can be dangerous. Sensual enjoyers forget that "the body, which is the vehicle of sexual pleasure, is also the vehicle of pain, disease, and death." (-*Endless Love,* Ravindra Svarūpa dāsa) It takes the essence of sixty drops of blood to make one drop of semen; furthermore, much subtle life energy *(prāṇa)* is lost in sex life. Rapid breathing during sex also shortens one's life, for the number of breaths a person will have in his lifetime is fixed at birth (therefore yogis practice breath restraint to prolong their lives). Then there is the danger of sexually transmitted diseases, which are extremely painful and nasty.
Furthermore, to the extent that a person becomes interested in sex, that much he loses all good qualities. For from lust develop all other bad qualities such as greed, personal ambition, hatred, and cruelty. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Sex life is the background of material existence. Demons are very fond of sex life. The more one is freed from the desire for sex, the more he is promoted to the level of the demigods; the more one is inclined to enjoy sex, the more he is degraded to the level of demonic life." (*SB* 3.20.23)
A lusty person becomes not only keenly interested in sexual enjoyment, but in all other forms of sense gratification also. Although such people may generally appear to act fairly reasonably, actually they are all self-centered and selfish—they are after what they can get for themselves. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.18.12) therefore analyzes that nondevotees have no good qualities, even though they may appear to. They are simply suffering and causing others to suffer in a mesh of greed, envy, and mutual exploitation, with just a veneer of social civility. This is especially evident in today's "me first" generation—a whole society raised on consumeristic greed and lust, with no higher moral than "get what you can grab."

Sex Fascination—The Disease of the Modern Age

Sex is the overwhelming obsession of modern society. Sexual promiscuity is so unrelentingly stressed that anyone who does not appear to the highly interested in it is generally considered to be a crank. Social pressure induces people to try to maintain juvenile lustiness long after the sensual high of youth has subsided. Thus millions of people remain emotionally immature all their lives. It is a sick world.

Ignorant of their relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and unsure of their status in rapidly changing societies which have no fixed values, people desperately desire an identity—an image of themselves which they feel good with and which others respect. In the schools, in the media, and by word of mouth, the story is out: sex is where it's at. The power of the media to mold people's attitudes and behavior is a pathetic but documented fact. Even if the average person's mind would not have been always absorbed in sexual thoughts, the media makes sure it is.

The advertising industry in particular tirelessly churns out unending pictures of dressed-up or undressed women—in magazines, on billboards, on television—always and everywhere. Despite grossly exploiting the bodies of women and the basest impulses of men, solely for the sake of making some already over-rich people even richer, their activities continue for the most part unquestioned. The general public absorb their propaganda and remain ever steeped in lust, having no knowledge of the necessity to resist. Thus, advertisements oozing with sexual overtones allure the willingly gullible public to mindlessly purchase everything from back-scrubbers to brandy. And the consumer society rolls on, with its members forever in an artificial state of sexual stimulation.

Constant titillation of the senses, however, increasingly dulls the spirit. Thus, despite all the celluloid promises, people find themselves cheated of real happiness. In adolescence, when the senses appear to have unlimited power to invoke euphoric delights, happiness through sense enjoyment seems not only to be a distinct possibility, but the very meaning of life. But the pleasures of youth, as the poets lament, is but a fleeting frolic. The ability of the body to enjoy is like a water-laden sponge. At first, if you just pinch it, water gushes

out. But as it is squeezed more and more, it gradually becomes difficult to get even a few drops of water from it.
Similarly, attempts for sexual enjoyment increasingly result in emptiness and frustration. Still, most people fail to recognize the limits of sexual enjoyment. Due to their misdirected education, they think that their lack of satisfaction with sex means there is something wrong in their approach to it. They may end up on a psychologist's couch or reading some of the hundreds of books on "improved" sex life (*Yoga for Sex, Tao for Sex, The Modern Woman's Guide to Sex, A Doctor's Sex Secrets, Diet for Better Sex,* etc.). However, the harder they grope for pleasure, the more surely it eludes them. As they furiously try to force their bodies into giving them the happiness which they regard as a natural birthright, they may turn to frequent masturbation, increased promiscuity, pornography, varieties of perversity, and ultimately violence. Actual civilization teaches its members to sublimate their sexual desires for higher, spiritual purposes. Modern civilization exploits people's sexual cravings, makes a business out of it, and sends people to hell by the millions. Seeing all this, the Vaiṣṇavas are sorry. If only people could understand this simple fact: We are all eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa. Our sexual desire is simply a perverted reflection of our heart's deepest longings to love Kṛṣṇa. If we just knew this we could all be happy. But in the darkness of the modern age it is very difficult to convince anyone that there is anything wrong with sex at all. The members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement have a great responsibility to somehow or other give this real knowledge to the people of the world. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement will go down in history as having saved mankind in its darkest hour."

Sense Gratification

"The idea that we can achieve happiness through the enjoyment of our senses, especially through that prototype of all pleasure, sex and sexual love, is an illusion which is perhaps the most deeply rooted and pervasive of all human convictions. With the disintegration of traditional religions and the official establishment of secular philosophies this illusion has gained the force of an

obsession." (-*Endless Love,* Ravindra Svarūpa dāsa)
Sex desire is based on the touch sensation. It is the topmost pleasure in, and therefore the main binding force of, the material world. But there are five other senses also: the senses of seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, and the mind. Any one of them can carry away the mind even of a man of discrimination who is endeavoring to control them.(*Bg.* 2.60) Furthermore, "each sense has many desires to be fulfilled."(*SB* 4.25.20) The pull of the senses is very strong and dangerous.
However, there is no real enjoyment in sense gratification. On the contrary, there is built-in pain in material pleasure. "Happiness derived from a combination of the senses and the sense objects is always a cause of distress." (*Bg.* 18.38) And, "as one's body engages in sense gratification, it becomes weaker and weaker daily."(*SB* 4.28.12)
Real pleasure means Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the happiness of the soul. The so-called pleasure of material life is simply an illusory construction of the mind.
"As for the agitations of the flickering mind, they are divided into two divisions. The first is called *avirodha-prīti*, or unrestricted attachment, and the other is called *virodha-yukta-krodha*, anger arising from frustration. Adherence to the philosophy of the Māyāvādīs, belief in the fruitive results of the *karma-vādīs*, and belief in plans based on materialistic desires are called *avirodha-prīti. Jñānīs*, *karmīs,* and materialistic planmakers generally attract the attention of conditioned souls, but when the materialists cannot fulfill their plans and when their devices are frustrated, they become angry. Frustration of material desires produces anger." (NOI, Text 1)
"Satisfaction of the mind can be obtained only by taking the mind away from thoughts of sense enjoyment. The more the mind dwells on sense gratification, the more it is dissatisfied."(*Bg.* 17.16)
Understanding this, the transcendentalist undergoes *tapasya* (austerity), giving up sense gratification. But even giving up sense gratification by practicing the rules and regulations of spiritual life is not enough—we also have to give up meditating on sense gratification. Unless and until we completely give up all hope of trying to enjoy this material world, we will not be able to firmly fix our intelligence; we will have ups and downs and will not taste the true bliss of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If our mind is filled with sense gratification, even though

we want Kṛṣṇa consciousness, by continuous practice we cannot forget the subject of sense gratification." (*SB* 4.22.30) And, "in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* it is stated that if someone sincerely wants to see the Lord and at the same time wants to enjoy this material world, he is considered to be a fool only."(*SB* 2.9.23) Therefore, "it is the duty of the transcendentalist to try strenuously to control desire." (*Bg.* 5.23)

Restricting Association with Women

Since the dawn of history, materialists have written thousands of books about dealing with women, and it is still a mystery to them. Especially if women are accepted as sense objects, relationships with them remain inextricably complex: nectar in the beginning, poison in the end. The *brahmacārī* has no real business associating with women—whatever must be there, he keeps as brief as possible. He knows that the male human form is meant for self-realization, and that attraction to the female form blocks such spiritual advancement.

Therefore the Vedic culture has always carefully restricted the mixing of men and women. Most of the time traditional *brahmacārīs* wouldn't see women at all, as they would be busy with their studies. Addressing all women as *mātā* (mother), the only relationship they might have was with their guru's wife, who in the absence of their real mother would look after the boys. Even then there were restrictions, especially after the boys reached puberty and if the wife was young. *Brahmacārīs* would not even see any young woman for the first twenty-five years of their lives. (Lecture, 06/02/75) *Vānaprasthas* kept the company of their aging wives, under strict vows, but for *sannyāsīs,* association with women was meant to be zero. Even *gṛhasthas* were only allowed limited association. Free mixing with women was only for *śūdras* and outcastes (i.e., those with no higher values of life).

For those interested in spiritual advancement, association with women must be restricted to the minimum. In the presence of a woman, the consciousness of a man changes. Even if several serious *brahmacārīs* are present in a room, and a chaste devotee woman enters for some reason, the mentality of the men

consciously or unconsciously will change. They will become self-conscious in their words and actions. So, even having philosophically accepted that we are all spirit souls, and even if we want to be liberal and forget the formalities and relate to women on a person-to-person basis, the *śāstra* forbids us to do so.
"As long as a living entity is not completely self-realized—as long as he is not independent of the misconception of identifying with his body, which is nothing but a reflection of the original body and senses—he cannot be relieved of the conception of duality, which is epitomized by the duality between man and woman. Thus there is every chance that he will fall down because his intelligence is bewildered." (*SB* 7.12.10, text)
In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborates: "One must realize perfectly that the living being is a spirit soul and is tasting various types of material bodies. One may theoretically understand this, but when one has practical realization, then he becomes a *paṇḍita,* one who knows. Until that time, the duality continues, and the conception of man and woman also continues. In this stage, one should be very careful in mixing with women. No one should think himself perfect and forget the *śāstric* injunction that one should be careful about associating even with his daughter, mother, or sister, not to speak of other women."
In Kṛṣṇa consciousness, man is good and woman is good; but, in the conditional stage, the combination is always dangerous. (Conversation, 31/07/76) Better to be careful than sorry. Even in the short history of ISKCON, we have seen many stalwart, sincere devotees (including *sannyāsīs*) fall down because of carelessness and complacency in dealing with women. "In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement it is advised that the *sannyāsīs* and *brahmacārīs* keep strictly aloof from the association of women so that there will be no chance of their falling down again as victims of lusty desires." (*SB* 7.15.36)
The material world is so designed that unless one goes to the jungles or mountains, he must have some dealings with the opposite sex. In the modern world there is no protection for *brahmacārīs;* man-woman relationships are quite free (which is the beginning of all hellish life, and quite unsuitable for spiritual progress).
ISKCON *brahmacārīs* have to deal with women (both devotees and nondevotees) a lot more than traditional *brahmacārīs* did, and in less favorable circumstances. Dealings with women should he formal, polite—and as little as

possible. If some talk must be there, keep your distance (stand well apart), avoid eye contact, and finish the business as soon as possible. Never get into an argument with a woman. Strict *brahmacārīs* do not attend marriage ceremonies, (*SB* 3.24.20) watch dramas with parts played by women, (-See Lecture After Play, 06/04/75) or see women dancing or hear their singing. (*SB* 6.18.41) The general principle to avoid intimate association must be strictly maintained. It is foolish to think that one can freely mix with the opposite sex and remain unagitated. Even the great *brahmacārī* Bhīṣmadeva expressed that he could not save himself if he were to associate with young girls. (Lecture, 16/08/73)

Nor should *brahmacārīs* accept service from women (even *prasāda* service should be separate). It is especially dangerous for a *brahmacārī* to see and talk to the same woman repeatedly. Once a friendly relationship is established, the downfall of the *brahmacārī* has begun.

Remember, women are powerful. Caesar controlled a mighty empire, but Cleopatra controlled Caesar. Of course, having to speak with women or sometimes discuss something with them is unavoidable. If at all possible mold your life in such a way that you don't normally have to have any dealings with women—the tendency should be toward zero dealings.

Brahmacārīs should avoid physically touching women, for to do so even accidentally will agitate the mind. Keep at least far enough away so that there is not even a possibility of brushing against a woman's clothing; and preferably further still. Lord Caitanya, even in His householder life, would stand well to the side if He saw a woman approaching on the path. Nor did He joke with women.

The eyes have a tendency to stray towards women, but this should be given up. When a man looks at a woman, then Cupid (Kāmadeva), standing nearby with his flower-bow, immediately shoots an arrow called Mohana (meaning infatuation, delusion, or folly) which causes the man to be fascinated by the female form. After this preliminary bewilderment, Cupid sends a further four arrows, namely: Stambhana, which stuns the man and causes him to forget all else; Unmādana, which causes him to be as if intoxicated; Śoṣaṇa, which causes intense attraction; and Tāpana, which deeply pierces the heart and causes it to burn.

Hardly anyone in the three worlds has the power to resist the influence of these arrows. *Māyā* is so strong that even in the midst of an enlivening *kīrtana,*

a devotee engaged in chanting the pure names of the Supreme Lord may become attracted upon seeing the form of the opposite sex (especially a dancing form). Therefore a *brahmacārī* should practice not looking at women, and should especially never see a woman dressing, combing her hair, running, playing sports, sleeping, bathing, undressed or partially dressed.

Never trust the mind. The mind will tell us, "I can speak to this woman, I won't get agitated," "She is only a child," or, "She is much older than me, so no problem," or "She is the chaste wife of so and so," or, "Anyway, I know the philosophy, I'm not going to speak to her for long, it's important, and I'm not going to fall down." But *śāstra* states that, what to speak of lusty rascals brought up in the modern sex-centered so-called civilization, even learned scholars of the Vedic age were totally forbidden from sitting close to their mother, sister, or daughter! (*SB* 9.19.17)

Such chaste behavior helps to control the mind. The natural tendency to be lusty is checked by deliberate restraint in dealings with the opposite sex. As soon as one even slightly indulges in looking at, unnecessarily talking with, or in any way behaving loosely with women, then the guard is let down and lusty desires begin to enter. Soon the intelligence becomes bewildered and, being impelled by the senses, one cannot distinguish between activities that are beneficial and those that should be avoided. One who loses control of his mind loses control of his life, and becomes controlled by *māyā* in the form of a woman.

Therefore a *brahmacārī* must be careful to control his mind and senses and not indulge them in the illusory pleasure derived from seeing, thinking about, or talking with women. The mind and senses are so strong that they can never, never, never be trusted. The only thing they can be trusted to do is to sell us off to *māyā* if given even a shadow of an opportunity. One slip into illicit sex will cause havoc in the life of a devotee.

Such strong strictures may seem odd in the context of modern social relationships, but the fact is that unless this discrimination between the sexes is reestablished, there is no hope for human society. "A civilization that allows men to mix unrestrictedly with women is an animal civilization. In Kali-yuga, people are extremely liberal, but mixing with women and talking with them as equals actually constitutes an uncivilized way of life." (*SB* 7.12.8)

The scriptures enjoin that we see all women as our mother. That's a healthy approach for a *brahmacārī*—even if most women, due to lack of training, don't

act like mothers.

Don't try to impress women. We may not even be fully conscious of it, but when women are present, the tendency is to try to impress them by our good behavior, eloquent speaking, athletic dancing, or whatever. Be careful.

However, fanatical anti-womanism is also unhealthy. How many woman-hating "staunch *brahmacārīs*" have succumbed and become big enjoyer householders? The roughness of so-called "super-*brahmacārīs*"—as if unkindness and rudeness to women were proof of their freedom from sex desire—is actually indicative of their agitation. Indeed, undesirable traits such as the desire to dominate or impress others, unnecessary anger, and voracious eating are all symptoms of sex desire manifest in different ways. Attachment and rejection are two sides of the coin of the mode of passion. Neutrality and detachment born of *sattva-guṇa* are required of a steady devotee. One must come to the mode of goodness to maintain *brahmacarya*. In goodness, knowledge and renunciation develop.

Our philosophy begins with *ātma-jñāna*—we are not these bodies, male or female. So we shouldn't develop a superiority complex: "I'm a big renounced *brahmacārī*. Who are these less intelligent women?" Who knows, possibly in our last lives we were in women's bodies and the women were in men's bodies! Still, we must keep the distinction. "Danger—keep your distance." Don't be rough, don't be rude, but don't worry about being considered odd or anti-social by being distant. Better be safe than sorry.

Attitudes in Devotional Service

One of the most important statements about Kṛṣṇa consciousness is in Śrīla Prabhupāda's Preface to the *Nectar of Instruction:* "Advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness depends on the attitude of the follower." Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that anyone can become a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa immediately, if he simply desires to. Advancement in devotional service means to purify our desires, and pure devotional service means to be fully absorbed in serving Kṛṣṇa without even the subtlest desire for any personal sense gratification. Only the most fortunate people can come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. People come

to devotional service for a variety of reasons. Some are seeking shelter from intense distress, others are looking for a simple, alternative lifestyle, some come out of curiosity, to see what it is all about, some because they want a cleaner, better life for themselves and their families. Some are directly searching for God and the meaning of life.

Of course, real devotional service is completely unmotivated, even by desires for peace and holistic well-being. Only such a surrendered attitude can bring complete satisfaction to the self. Those who are most intelligent will, from the beginning of their practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, sincerely endeavor to be pure devotees of Kṛṣṇa. Such an attitude is always to be encouraged, for it is the essence of our movement.

Others, however, may consider such an outlook to be utopian. How is it possible, they will postulate, for those coming from such sinful backgrounds to consider seriously the prospect of becoming pure devotees, completely free from all material desires? "Better be realistic," they say, "make some compromise with *māyā,* and continue at some level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Of course, everyone is encouraged to begin devotional service at whatever level he finds convenient, and it is not expected that all will take to it fully from the very beginning. Indeed, the whole system of *varṇāśrama-dharma* (which forms the basis of Vedic culture) is meant for the gradual elevation of materially contaminated persons who are willing to adopt some measure of Kṛṣṇa consciousness into their lives but are not yet prepared for full surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

However, Śrīla Prabhupāda's whole mood (and that of Lord Caitanya and of our entire *sampradāya*) is that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so easily available in this Kali-yuga by the easy process of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, so why not take full advantage of it, perfect our lives, and go back home, back to Godhead? Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Don't think that this chanting and dancing will not lead to the desired goal. It will. It is the assurance of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu that one will get all perfection by this process." (-Purport to the song *Parama-karuṇā)*

It is with this faith that *brahmacārīs* engage in devotional activities. True *brahmacārīs* strive for the mood of *ahaituky-apratihatā-bhakti*—constant engagement in devotional service without any personal motive. (*SB* 1.2.6) They are always eager for service and do not expect any special facilities or respect in return. Such pure devotional service is the ideal and essence of *brahmacārī* life.

Devotees who are not thus striving for perfection, who are executing mixed devotional service, may consider the prospect of becoming a pure devotee in this life to be impossible. Especially those who were once thus endeavoring, but who have fallen away from the strict standard of devotional service, may even be cynical about the efforts of those devotees who continue to perform devotional service with enthusiasm. But we should know this for what it is: *māyā.*

Just because someone has fallen away doesn't mean that everybody will fall away. The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is perfect. If anybody follows it with sincerity and vigor and refuses to leave the path under any circumstances, his success is guaranteed. If anybody leaves this movement it is not the fault of the process. It is the failure of the individual to surrender to it.

We should be careful to avoid developing negative attitudes in our devotional life. After all, whatever difficulties the material energy throws at us (as she undoubtedly will, to test our sincerity and fortitude), we always have cause for optimism because we are on the path back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "As long as a person is fully in cooperation with the wishes of the Lord, guided by the bona fide *brāhmaṇas* and Vaiṣṇavas and strictly following regulative principles, one has no cause for despondency, however trying the circumstances of life." (*SB* 1.9.12) So it is better to avoid the company of doubters and groaners and make our lifetime plans for serving Kṛṣṇa within this movement. Why not?

We have already come so far. We have turned our backs on materialistic values, shaved our heads, donned dhotis and *tilaka*—so why not go the whole way and surrender fully to Kṛṣṇa? At least we should try for that. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave the example that if a student makes the effort to pass an exam in the top grade he will at least get a passing grade; but if he simply aims for a pass, he is likely to fail. (Lecture, 17/01/71) So we should think, "In this life I will end all association with this material world forever. I will attain Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Often young *brahmacārīs,* fresh from the grind of material life, are bursting with enthusiasm; but after some time they may lose that freshness. Śrīla Prabhupāda noted that, "Beginners in Kṛṣṇa consciousness have a tendency to relax their efforts in a short time, but to advance spiritually you must resist this temptation and continually increase your efforts and devotion." (SPL Ch. 19)

Young *brahmacārīs* are usually trained strictly in the beginning. But after being in the movement a few years, when they become a little mature in devotional service, the pressure is often relaxed. It may be that no one is pushing them to surrender or to follow the temple programs diligently. At that time the devotee's spiritual advancement will depend to a much greater extent on his own determination to apply himself to the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is required that devotees become spiritually grown-up. Make a commitment to stay in this movement and go on practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness no matter what. And always endeavor to become an advanced devotee. "Without sincere endeavor in devotional service one cannot obtain love of Godhead." (*Cc. Madhya* 24.171) "An easygoing life and attainment of perfection in transcendental realization cannot go together." (*SB* 2.9.24)

Training

To become free from material desires and fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, training under the guidance of an expert devotee is absolutely required. Traditionally, therefore, *brahmacārīs* lived under the direct tutelage of their spiritual master, being surrendered to him and serving him as a menial servant under strict regulation. *Brahmacārīs* would perform all kinds of menial services, would beg for the guru, and would not even eat unless called by the guru. They accepted any chastisements, with no question of arguing. This was complete training for smashing the false ego.

Although such rigid discipline is hardly possible nowadays, our movement is nevertheless primarily educational and is meant to provide training. Kṛṣṇa conscious training is so powerful that it quickly raises even the most fallen to the position of *mahātmas*, great souls.

It is the duty of those who are able to help others to do so. One who has spiritual knowledge, but out of miserliness fails to impart it to others, is never blessed with realization of it, and gradually he loses that knowledge altogether. Therefore, for our own good as well as for the good of others, we have to preach, teach, and train. Devotees are joining this wonderful Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, eagerly hopeful of attaining Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. If

senior devotees don't help them get fixed on the path, who will?
However, training new men is not easy. It requires great tolerance, dedication, and humility. But whether or not a temple has a formal Bhakta Program, that atmosphere of training and instruction must be there. Junior devotees should, as soon as possible, become qualified as competent preachers, able to give classes and present Kṛṣṇa consciousness anywhere, anytime. This movement needs hundreds and thousands of convinced devotees to dedicate their lives for spreading the glories of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, so when new recruits come they will certainly need training.
Śrīla Prabhupāda was always training his disciples. Everything we know about Kṛṣṇa consciousness and about how to live as human beings we know because Śrīla Prabhupāda took the trouble to instruct us, day after day, minute after minute. He trained his disciples so that they could train others. This is *guru-paramparā*. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "What is the use of a lecture unless you train them?" (Conversation, 20/04/7)
If Kṛṣṇa sees that we are serious to look after the devotees that we have, he will send us many more new recruits to expand His movement more and more. All our temples should be dynamic centers where new people are coming all the time to discover the transcendental experience being imparted there.

Why so Many Rules and Regulations?

All devotees, especially *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs*, have to follow a set of rules and regulations that would surprise a materialist: rising before 4:00 a.m., attending services, bowing down before the Deities, and so on throughout the day. "It's brainwashing," the anti-cultists scream, "for weak-minded morons only." It's a fact—our minds are weak before *māyā*, and following the rules and regulations of Kṛṣṇa consciousness protect us from her onslaught. The *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.64) describes that by following the regulative principles of freedom, one can control his senses and obtain the complete mercy of the Lord.
Beginners in Kṛṣṇa consciousness may have apprehensions about so many restrictions. Such neophytes need not be forced to follow all the subsidiary

rules, but may be requested to simply chant, dance, take *prasāda,* and hear about Kṛṣṇa. Rūpa Gosvāmī advised that if somehow or other nondevotees can be brought to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, then all the rules and regulations can be introduced later.

To become successful in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we must accept the devotional syllabus given by the previous *ācāryas.* Śrīla Prabhupāda: "No one can be situated in an exalted position without having undertaken a regulative life of rules and regulations." (*SB* 2.9.40) When an aspiring devotee comes to realize this, he will happily take up the practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness strictly. Forcing austerity on new and unwilling candidates is not a good policy. But those who have submitted themselves for initiation must be serious, otherwise their initiation is meaningless.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not difficult but determination is difficult. That determination comes by *tapasya* and therefore we have rules and regulations. If you follow the rules and regulations then you'll be determined, otherwise you will be a victim of *māyā,* The rules and regulations are there just to keep you fixed up in your determination. But if you don't follow then you fall down." (Conversation, 10/01/74)

Submission and the Guru-Disciple Relationship

"A student should practice completely controlling his senses. He should be submissive and should have an attitude of firm friendship for the spiritual master. With a great vow, the *brahmacārī* should live at the *gurukula,* only for the benefit of the guru." (*SB* 7.12.1)

Traditionally, *brahmacārī* life begins when a young boy is sent to a *gurukula.* Dependence upon the guru is so intrinsic to *brahmacārī* life that one cannot properly be considered a *brahmacārī* unless he has accepted the shelter of a guru. Simply being celibate does not constitute *brahmacarya.*

In all the four *āśramas,* one must be submissive to the guru. But submission is especially practiced by *brahmacārīs.* In the Vedic tradition, *brahmacārīs* live with the guru and are subject to constant discipline. This is training in surrender—by serving the guru one learns the selfless service mood needed to

approach Kṛṣṇa. The business of a *brahmacārī* is to work hard to please his spiritual master. Such service should be single-minded, without any thought of personal comfort or gain. A *brahmacārī* is meant for one-pointedly executing the order of his spiritual master, not doing whatever he likes, however he likes, whenever he likes.

"*Brahmacārī's* life means to serve the spiritual master as menial servant. Whatever he asks, the *brahmacārī* will do." (Lecture, 12/09/69)

The *brahmacārī* is expected to be strongly attached to his guru. Before resting and on rising he offers his obeisances and prays to him. The guru is reciprocally conscientious in the discharge of his duties. The guru is supposed to accept service. On his personal behalf he is not inclined to, but he accepts it for the disciple's spiritual benefit, not for his own material benefit. The guru has every right to ask any service of his disciples, especially *brahmacārī* disciples (that he does not misuse this power is part of his qualification as guru).

And reciprocally the guru delivers Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He asks his *brahmacārī* disciples to sacrifice and be austere, but he is most prepared to sacrifice. A so-called guru who simply lives comfortably at the expense of his disciples' sacrifice becomes a cheater, no matter what lofty words he may speak. One must be careful to accept an advanced devotee as his guru, because he must submit to the desire of the guru. If the guru's desire is pure, the disciple can easily make spiritual advancement; but if the guru's desire is materially tinged, he may mislead his disciples.

Detachment, Austerity, and Renunciation

"Of all the living entities who have accepted material bodies in this world, one who has been awarded this human form should not work hard day and night simply for sense gratification, which is available for the dogs and hogs that eat stool. One should engage in penance and austerity to attain the divine position of devotional service. By such activity, one's heart is purified, and when one attains this position, he attains eternal, blissful life, which is transcendental to material happiness and which continues forever." (*SB* 5.5.1)

Human life is meant for self-realization. Self-realization can be developed only from the platform of detachment from everything material. Śrīla Prabhupāda describes detachment as one of the characteristics of ecstatic love:

> "The senses are always desiring sense enjoyment, but when a devotee develops transcendental love for Kṛṣṇa, his senses are no longer attracted by material desires. This state of mind is called detachment. There is a nice example of this detachment in connection with the character of King Bharata. In the Fifth Canto, Fourteenth Chapter, Verse 43, of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* it is stated, 'Emperor Bharata was so attracted by the beauty of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa that even in his youthful life he gave up all kinds of attachments to family, children, friends, kingdom, etc., as though they were untouchable stools.'

"Emperor Bharata provides a typical example of detachment. He had everything enjoyable in the world, but he left it. This means that detachment does not mean artificially keeping oneself aloof and apart from the allurements of attachment. Even in the presence of such allurements, if one can remain unattracted by material attachments, he is called detached. In the beginning, of course, a neophyte devotee must try to keep himself apart from all kinds of alluring attachments, but the real position of a mature devotee is that even in the presence of all allurements, he is not at all attracted. This is the actual criterion of detachment." (NOD, Ch. 18)

To develop detachment, *tapasya* (austerity) and knowledge are necessary. "*Tapasya* (denial of material activities) is the first principle of spiritual life." (*SB* 6.4.46) "If we purify our existence by *tapasya,* we can also do wonderful things by the grace of the Lord. Indeed, nothing is possible without *tapasya.* The more we engage in austerity the more we become powerful by the grace of the Lord." (*SB* 6.4.50) "*Tapasya* means voluntary austerities performed for spiritual perfection." (*SB* 3.12.4) "No one can become an advanced devotee without developing detachment, and to develop detachment, training in austerity is required. Voluntarily we have to accept things which may not be very comfortable for the body, but are conducive for self-realization. The *smṛti-śāstra* defines *tapasya* as 'complete control of the mind and senses for their complete concentration on one kind of activity.'" (*SB* 6.1.13-14)

In civilized human life, three *āśramas* are meant purely for *tapasya.* Only in the *gṛhastha-āśrama* is a little sense enjoyment allowed. However, in Kali-yuga people cannot perform severe austerities as were practiced in bygone ages. Therefore Lord Caitanya has mercifully introduced His *saṅkīrtana* movement,

which is transcendentally pleasing from the very beginning. Indeed, in Kali-yuga, if one overly stresses austerity without taking to *saṅkīrtana,* his heart simply becomes hard and dry, like that of a Māyāvādī. On the other hand, sense gratification must be given up. If one tries to enjoy transcendental bliss without a service mood, without discipline, and without giving up sense gratification, he becomes a *sahajiyā*—an impostor devotee.

Detachment is automatically acquired by performing devotional service. (*SB* 1.2.7) So why are discipline and austerity necessary? The reason is that in the neophyte stage we are not fixed. Sometimes we feel like performing our devotional duties and sometimes we don't. But *sādhana-bhakti* means that we *must* follow. For instance, we may not feel like rising for *maṅgala-ārati.* But the stricture is there: we must get up. In this way the irrational mind is conquered. By submitting to the disciplinary process we are forced to do what is good for us, even if we don't feel like doing it.

Advanced devotees are spontaneously fixed in pure devotional service and don't need to accept austerity or discipline—although they usually do so anyway. But the vast majority of us are far below that level and should not foolishly think that we are free from *māyā's* attack. As soon as we think that we are safe, *māyā* will smash us. So better to be as strict as possible in performing devotional service.

After all, austerity cannot be avoided. The *karmīs* also have to undertake so many difficulties to maintain their standard of sense gratification. And the little austerity we do accept is insignificant compared to that of transcendentalists in previous ages, or even compared to many *sādhus* in India today. So if we find the austerities in devotional service difficult, we need not become disturbed. After all, the very meaning of austerity is "difficult."

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "There is undoubtedly trouble in executing penance. But the trouble accepted in executing *bhakti-yoga* is transcendental happiness from the very beginning, whereas the trouble of penance in other processes of self-realization (*jñāna-yoga, dhyāna-yoga,* etc.) without any Vaikuṇṭha realization, ends in trouble only and nothing more." (*SB* 2.9.9)

Basic austerities for *brahmacārīs* are: following all the rules and regulations of devotional life (rising early, taking only *kṛṣṇa-prasāda,* etc.); dedicating all our time and energy to work hard in Kṛṣṇa's service; (*SB* 9.4.26) living simply, accepting whatever living conditions are available without making elaborate arrangements for our comfort; living without sex and family life; and

submitting to the order of the guru in all respects. Our whole life is austere: hard work, long hours, no pay, no privacy, no prestige, no sense gratification, and no holidays—pure bliss.

On top of this, we should try to minimize eating and sleeping. However, it is not our process to mortify the body as the yogis do. Artificial penances and austerities will not help. Sometimes devotees become enthusiastic to follow rigid observances for radically reducing eating and sleeping, but Śrīla Prabhupāda was more interested that his disciples accept the austerities involved in preaching than those of full Ekādaśī fasting, rigid Cāturmāsya observance, or concocted austerities. Sometimes devotees embark on a program of drastic reduction of eating and sleeping, but such endeavors usually end in a massive meal and a long sleep. Better to be regulated, steady, sensible, and patient. Attainment of perfection in Kṛṣṇa consciousness requires a sustained haul, not a passionate fling.

Austerities that do not help us to develop an attraction for Kṛṣṇa are simply a waste of time, no matter how painstakingly performed. *Śrama eva hi kevalam.* (*SB* 1.2.8) Although the observance of certain austerities are required for those desiring success in devotional life, our movement is not puritanical. We stress the positive bliss of Kṛṣṇa consciousness more than the apparently negative aspect of having to undertake many difficulties.

"We are trying to give as much happiness to our students as possible. Otherwise, unless one is happy, it is a little difficult, unless one is very advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore our policy is *'yogo bhavati siddhi.' 'Yuktāhāra-vihārasya yogo bhavati siddhi.'* We are yogis, but we are not that kind of yogi, unnecessarily giving trouble to the body. No. *Yuktāhāra.* You require to eat, and you eat. Don't starve. Don't unnecessarily fast. But don't eat voraciously. That is bad. That is not *yukta.* You eat, but don't eat voraciously. 'Because there is something very palatable, let me eat voraciously.' And then fall sick. And if you cannot digest, then you will sleep. You will sleep only. Therefore don't eat more, but eat whatever is necessary." (Lecture, 25/11/73)

Devotional service under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master is the only method of satisfying Kṛṣṇa; there is no mechanical means of attaining Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Although great advanced devotees like the six Gosvāmīs almost completely gave up eating and sleeping, we should not attempt to imitate them. After all, they were experiencing the highest transcendental

bliss and were almost oblivious of their bodily condition. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If we immediately try to become like Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī by imitating him, we are sure to fail, and whatever progress we have made will be defeated." (*Path of Perfection,* Chapter 4)

Discipline

One should mold his life so as to always think of Kṛṣṇa. "Always think of Kṛṣṇa and never forget Him." Our whole life is dedicated to understanding Kṛṣṇa. Why then, can't we think of Kṛṣṇa? Because our consciousness is polluted. Our heads are full of all kinds of nonsense which blocks remembrance of Kṛṣṇa. These contaminations begin with sex desire. Śrīla Prabhupāda stated that if one can just get free from sex desire, he is 50% liberated. (Letter, 15/02/68) As much as we are afflicted by sex desire, that much we cannot remember Kṛṣṇa. Until we completely reject sense gratification, physical and mental, once and for all, we will not be able to fix the intelligence.

Acts of sense gratification are preceded by desires and contemplation. Since these are functions of the mind, a *brahmacārī* is trained to control the mind by the intelligence. One whose intelligence remains controlled by his mind is no better than an animal or a child; nothing auspicious is possible for him. However, the mind is as difficult to control as the raging wind. Therefore, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura has advised us to discipline the rascal mind by beating it a hundred times in the morning with shoes, and a hundred times at night with a broom! (*SB* 5.6.4) As long as our intelligence is not completely fixed at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, such stringent discipline is necessary.

The *brahmacārī* voluntarily agrees to be disciplined by the expert spiritual master. By his mercy, the impossible—controlling the mind and senses—becomes possible.

Determination

Without being fully determined, no one can hope to get free from sexual bondage. "*Māyā* is so strong that unless one is determined not to fall victim, even the Supreme Personality of Godhead cannot give protection." (*Cc. Madhya* 17.14)

Especially for one who has not been trained from childhood, to follow the eight aspects of celibacy may seem almost impossible. But it is possible, as stated by the greatest *brahmacārī*, Nārada Muni, in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.15.22): "By making plans with determination, one should give up lusty desires for sense gratification." In the purport Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: "Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī has suggested how one can conquer lusty desires for sense gratification. One cannot give up thinking of women, for thinking in this way is natural; even while walking on the streets one will see so many women. However, if one is determined not to live with a woman, even while seeing a woman he will not become lusty. If one is determined not to have sex, he can automatically conquer lusty desires. An example given in this regard is that even if one is hungry, if on that particular day he has decided to observe fasting, he can naturally conquer the disturbances of hunger and thirst."

Higher Taste

We have to be determined to maintain our celibacy, but how do we maintain our determination? A philosophical understanding of the miseries of material life will certainly help us, but is not in itself a guarantee of safety from fall down. We have seen even philosophically competent devotees slip away. Especially in Kali-yuga, unless one develops a sense of *bhakti*, satisfaction within celibacy is almost impossible. As parts and parcels of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Enjoyer, we have the pleasure-seeking propensity (*ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt*). (*Vedānta-sūtra* 1.1.12) Unless we get some real taste from our devotional service, we will be attracted to material enjoyment.

Often, newly surrendered devotees get a rush of Kṛṣṇa conscious bliss. Kṛṣṇa gives them a strong dose of nectar to make their commitment solid. But after some time the bliss doesn't come automatically; you have to work for it. Even advanced devotees must constantly re-apply themselves to the surrendering process. Then Kṛṣṇa will bless them, and they will never think of going away. However, if we perform devotional service with our own pleasure in mind, we will never be able to achieve it. As parts and parcels of Kṛṣṇa, we can only be satisfied by satisfying Him, as much as the limbs of the body become satisfied by satisfying the stomach. We simply have to hear and chant the names of Kṛṣṇa, and surrender to Him, willingly undertaking all difficulties in His service. Then, when He is satisfied with us, He will make us happy.

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a happy movement. Enthusiastic devotees taste bliss at every moment. And for exalted devotees who are actually experiencing the unlimited transcendental happiness of advanced Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the so-called pleasure of mundane sex enjoyment seems no more significant than straw in the street. Most of us are unfortunately not so elevated, but at least we have all at some time tasted some drops of bliss and had a tiny insight into what it would be like if we were actually Kṛṣṇa conscious.

So if we are suffering from an attack from *māyā,* are feeling down and out, and are not very enthusiastic to serve, we can reflect back on better times in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, when Kṛṣṇa revealed a little of His mercy to us and we were moved to tears or to jump up and down in ecstasy. We have to go on searching for that nectar. If we go back to the process—chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, dance for Kṛṣṇa, take Kṛṣṇa *prasāda,* hear about Kṛṣṇa, do some service—we will become happy. Devotional service is non-different from Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa is the reservoir of all pleasure. *Uttiṣṭha jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata:* "Wake up from the sleep of *māyā* and attain the boon of eternal nectarean life." (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.14)

Association

Good association is essential to help maintain the determination necessary for making strong progress in spiritual life. On the other hand, bad association can

easily and quickly destroy whatever spiritual development we have made. Throughout his books Śrīla Prabhupāda again and again stresses the need for proper association. A few quotes:

> "Without the association (of persons who are Kṛṣṇa conscious and engaged in devotional service) one cannot make advancement. Simply by theoretical knowledge or study one cannot make any appreciable advancement. One must give up the association of materialistic persons and seek the association of devotees because without the association of devotees one cannot understand the activities of the Lord... Association with devotees means association with the Lord. The devotee who takes this association develops the consciousness of rendering service to the Lord and then, being situated in the transcendental position of devotional service, he gradually becomes perfect." (*SB* 3.25.25)

"One should not associate with a coarse fool who is bereft of all knowledge of self-realization and who is no more than a dancing dog in the hands of a woman. The restriction of association with such foolish persons is especially meant for those who are in the line of advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. "If one associates with a *śūdra,* a foolish person who is like a dancing dog in the hands of a woman, then he cannot make any progress. Lord Caitanya has advised that any person who is engaged in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and who desires to pass beyond material nescience must not associate himself with women or with persons interested in material enjoyment. For a person seeking advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, such association is more dangerous than suicide." (-*SB* 3.31.34 Text and Purport)
"Realization of the Lord is possible only in the association of devotees." (*SB* 7.6.20-23)
"Dhruva Mahārāja said: 'O unlimited Lord, kindly bless me so that I may associate with great devotees who engage in your transcendental service constantly, as the waves of the river constantly flow.' The significant point in Dhruva Mahārāja's statement is that he wanted the association of pure devotees. Transcendental devotional service cannot be complete and cannot be relishable without the association of devotees. We have therefore established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Anyone who is trying to be aloof from this Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Society and yet engage in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is living in a great hallucination, for this is not possible. From this statement by Dhruva Mahārāja it is clear that unless one is associated with devotees, his devotional service does not mature; it does not

become distinct from material activities. Only in the association of pure devotees can the words of Lord Kṛṣṇa be fully potent and relishable to the heart and ear. Devotional service in the association of devotees is the cause of the development of further devotional service. It is possible to mature in devotional service only in the association of devotees." (*SB* 4.9.11)

A single twig can easily be broken, but many twigs bundled together become impossible to break. We want to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, but in our heart there are still many mundane desires. We all need help to make advancement. By associating with enthusiastic devotees we can help each other nourish our desires for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Strong association creates a strong atmosphere.

Therefore even in associating with devotees, strict *brahmacārīs* must be selective. Those who want to remain strong *brahmacārīs* must associate with those who are very serious about spiritual life, whose association encourages and inspires remaining purely on the spiritual platform. The best association for *brahmacārīs* is with *sannyāsīs* or senior *brahmacārīs,* with those who are convinced of the necessity of living separately from women. If a *gṛhastha* or even a so-called *brahmacārī* is loose ("loose" means not committed to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, not following strict *sādhana,* not following the regulative principles, or often talking *prajalpa* or mixing freely with women), his association should be avoided by serious *brahmacārīs*.

Serious *brahmacārīs* should also be careful of associating with devotees whose philosophical understanding of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is different from that taught by Śrīla Prabhupāda, or who have a tendency to be "political." It is best for *brahmacārīs* to remain simple, pure, and aloof from politics and chronic complainers. Remaining respectful and polite, they should rather seek the association of well-situated devotees, whatever *āśrama* they may be in.

Everyone is looking for *rasa* ("juice") in their relationships. A real *brahmacārī* does not identify himself materially as a man, but as an eternal servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa. A man needs a woman, but a servant of the Lord needs the Lord. Therefore a committed *brahmacārī* stays in the association of devotees and experiences taste in spiritual relationships. He does not try to enjoy material relationships. By serving together, encouraging and checking each other, and providing help in times of spiritual crisis, devotees build solid friendships based on Kṛṣṇa consciousness—unlike materialistic friendships that are based on sense gratification. This is real friendship, perhaps for the first time in many

lifetimes. If a *brahmacārī* does not get such *rasa* in his relationships with devotees, he will tend to look for it amongst women and *karmīs*.

However, devotees are often intense, and living with them can be austere and hard on the false ego. This is especially so for *brahmacārīs,* who have less independence, and are expected to surrender more than, the members of any other *āśrama*. New devotees in particular may find it hard to adjust to a new lifestyle. And because of their lack of training, they may sometimes act or speak improperly, and need to be corrected. But despite all difficulties, *brahmacārīs* should resolve to stick to the path. Better take the knocks of the *brahmacārī-āśrama* than the much harder knocks of life outside of Kṛṣṇa consciousness or of married life within Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If you a need a break, take shelter of the holy name, Prabhupāda's books, and Kṛṣṇa *prasāda*. Don't go outside.

The best association is to be found within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. There are many Vaiṣṇava societies in the world, but ISKCON is Śrīla Prabhupāda's movement. Śrīla Prabhupāda was especially benedicted by Lord Caitanya to fulfill His preaching mission, and ISKCON is the special movement meant for receiving and distributing Lord Caitanya's mercy.

In this preaching movement, by the pressure of practical necessity, devotees are forced to work hard, cooperate, and surrender. Sometimes devotees make mistakes or may not seem very sophisticated, but we should know that they are being purified in the fire of *saṅkīrtana* and that we will be too, if we remain sincere and stick with the devotees.

Sometimes junior devotees may be living in the same temple with senior devotees and would like to take their association (which they so much need to help them in their spiritual development) but are hesitant to do so, thinking that such senior devotees will not like to be disturbed by them. But actually the opposite is true. If approached in a proper and respectful way, any senior Vaiṣṇava will happily give direction and advice. Indeed, it is the duty of senior devotees to help junior devotees advance. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura advises that one become the dog of a Vaiṣṇava. Just as a puppy dog eagerly tries to take shelter of a master, so we should not be shy in approaching Vaiṣṇavas to take their association. We should not be overly familiar with Vaiṣṇavas senior to us, but should approach them with submissive inquiry and should offer to render some service to such Vaiṣṇavas. This is the process for receiving spiritual

knowledge given by Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.34).
A practical point regarding association is that, as far as possible, a *brahmacārī* should never be alone, but should always be in the association of other devotees (preferably also *brahmacārīs).* In the Madhva-*sampradāya, brahmacārīs* going outside the *āśrama* are supposed to do so in groups of at least four, to give each other association and protection. It is especially dangerous and improper fo *brahmacārīs* to go anywhere alone without taking permission from (or if they be more senior *brahmacārīs*, without at least informing) their authorities. For a *brahmacārī* to go anywhere alone in *karmī* dress is particularly jeopardous and should not be encouraged or allowed except in extraordinary circumstances.

Simplicity

"Our life is simple. We do not want luxury." (Conversation, 31/07/76)
Simplicity, mental and external, is the hallmark of a *brahmacārī.* He does not accumulate possessions, but keeps only what he needs. He certainly does not have a personal bank account. Whatever he has, he considers to be his guru's property, not his own. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that *saralatā* (simplicity) is the first qualification of a Vaiṣṇava. (*Cc. Antya* 2.117) If a *brahmacārī* feels attracted to accumulating possessions and opulent life, it is not a good sign for his spiritual advancement. Nevertheless, if he wants such things, he can marry, earn money, and buy whatever his wife allows him to. But as long as he is in the *brahmacārī-āśrama* he should live and dress simply.
Śrīla Prabhupāda: "For a devotee to be satisfied with the bare necessities is the best advice for spiritual advancement." (*SB* 7.15.21) "A *brahmacārī* factually has no needs." (*SB* 10.8.4)
Brahmacārīs should be satisfied with whatever comes to them of its own accord and should not make arrangements for comfortable living. They should be wary of material opulence, even if it comes to them without endeavor. *Brahmacārīs* are supposed to be simple and renounced, so it is not proper for them to accumulate money beyond their immediate needs. Even if a *brahmacārī* is collecting much *lakṣmī,* he shouldn't want to, or feel that he has

a right to, spend it on unnecessary purchases for himself. For a *brahmacārī* to have a large sum of money without a specific Kṛṣṇa conscious purpose, or to keep savings, is antithetical to the *brahmacārī* ethic. It is also dangerous, for to keep money without using it for Kṛṣṇa is Rāvaṇa's policy and leads to fall down. The proper standard for *brahmacārīs* is to give all money that comes their way to the temple.

In this way a *brahmacārī's* mind can remain uncluttered. He has only one interest in life: service to guru and Kṛṣṇa. He does not have family responsibilities to worry about, nor is he involved in cliques or political factions. His clear mind is a potent breeding ground for Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Referring to *gurukula,* Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "Simple, honest, *brahmacārī brāhmaṇas;* that is what I want." (-Quoted by Dhanurdhara Swami)

Sādhana

"My dear Arjuna, O winner of wealth, if you cannot fix your mind upon Me without deviation, then follow the regulative principles of *bhakti-yoga.* In this way develop a desire to attain Me." (*Bg.* 12.9)

Good *sādhana* is the basis of steady advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *Brahmacārī* life is traditionally centered around *sādhana:* chanting mantras, studying the scriptures, and worship.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us a standard morning program of *maṅgala-ārati, tulasī-ārati,* Deity greeting, *guru-pūjā,* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class; and an evening program of *tulasī-ārati, sandhyā-ārati,* and *Bhagavad-gītā* class—plus of course chanting at least sixteen rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra.* If we strictly follow this schedule with faith and enthusiasm, we will always remain enlivened in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

So devotees should get off the mental platform and get right into the program. Don't just stand around in *kīrtana*—dance nicely for the pleasure of the Lord. Don't slur sixteen rounds—pray to the Holy Name. Tune into class with mind and ears open. There is so much nectar in hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa that Kṛṣṇa Himself comes as Lord Caitanya to relish that *rasa.* But we have to

apply ourselves to become eligible to get that taste. We have to actually take that one step, and then Kṛṣṇa will tssake His hundred towards us.

Good *sādhana* means to attend the whole morning program every single day without fail, rising by 4:00 a.m. at the latest, being present at every function (*guru-pūjā*, class, etc.) from the beginning to the end (not wandering in late or wandering out early), to chant all or most of one's prescribed rounds during the morning program, and to be enthusiastic and attentive throughout. A good morning program gives us spiritual strength to carry out our Kṛṣṇa conscious duties throughout the day.

Devotees who are conscientious about the morning program gradually develop strength and depth in Kṛṣṇa consciousness; but those who, for whatever reason, decrease their inclination towards early morning hearing and chanting, gradually become weakened and susceptible to *māyā's* attack. Certainly, those not committed to rising early and strong *sādhana* cannot remain as *brahmacārīs,* nor should such persons be allowed to live in the *brahmacārī-āśrama.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda also wanted devotees to attend the evening program, or to utilize the evening hours for preaching engagements.

Some adjustments may be necessary for *pūjārīs,* cooks, and traveling preachers, but we must be careful not to become lax in, or get insufficient, hearing and chanting. If we are obliged to miss a part of the morning or evening *sādhana* programs, we must set some time aside at another time of the day to make up. Best for cooks and *pūjārīs* is to rise very early and chant japa before *maṅgala-ārati.*

If devotees feel weak in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, with decreased enthusiasm for devotional service and an increase in material desires, the root cause is usually poor hearing and chanting. How to get the enthusiasm back? Just by acting enthusiastically, enthusiasm comes. Just try jumping in *kīrtana,* even mechanically, and see if you can stay morose. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Dance. Even if there is no ecstasy, dance and it will come." (-From *ISKCON in the 70's* by Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī; Vol.1, p. 40)

Reading and attentive japa are extremely important. Japa should be chanted clearly and properly heard. And *brahmacārīs* must find time to read. *Bhagavad-gītā* (16.1) states that *svādhyāya,* study of the scriptures, is especially meant for *brahmacārīs.* Therefore *brahmacārīs* should assiduously study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books and other authorized Kṛṣṇa conscious literature, and avoid

reading useless *karmī* or Māyāvādī rubbish. Reading Prabhupāda's books helps attach us to Kṛṣṇa and free us from *māyā.*

Māyā is always trying to take away our enthusiasm, and often attacks devotees in the form of doubt. Doubt is a disease which can culminate in spiritual death. (*Bg.* 9.3) Many devotees, especially new devotees, despite going on with the Kṛṣṇa conscious process, are not fully convinced of what they are doing. For them Kṛṣṇa recommends: "The doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance should be slashed with the weapon of knowledge." (*Bg.* 4.42) Hearing *kṛṣṇa-kathā* is *bhavauṣadhi,* the medicine for the disease of material life. (*SB* 10.1.4)

Without reading Prabhupāda's books, how will we maintain the firm conviction needed to voluntarily undertake the austerities necessary for self-realization? "All the devotees connected with the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement must read all the books that have been translated; otherwise they will simply eat, sleep, and fall down from their position. Thus they will miss the opportunity to attain an eternal blissful life of transcendental pleasure."(*Cc. Madhya* 25.278)

Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended that those who want to be *gosvāmīs* (masters of the senses) should carefully study the Nectar of Instruction; therefore *brahmacārīs* can obviously benefit from the advice given therein.

About *japa* Śrīla Prabhupāda has written: "Of all the regulative principles, the spiritual master's order to chant at least sixteen rounds is most essential." (*Cc. Madhya* 22.113) Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī has compiled a *Japa Reform Notebook* and *Reading Reform Notebook* to help devotees develop good *japa* and reading habits.

Regulation

Regulation means to do the same thing at the same time every day, or if not at exactly the same time, at least in a fixed sequence based around an approximate schedule. For instance, a devotee may be regulated to rise by 3.30 a.m., bathe, and chant a few rounds before *maṅgala-ārati*, to eat his main meal at midday, and so on. Such regulation helps to fix the determination and to get

off the mental platform. A devotee with a fixed time to rise does not think, "I'm too tired," or "It's too cold." He just gets up. He does not have to think what to do next; he just sticks to his schedule.

Regulation helps to keep the mind peaceful and makes for the most efficient use of time. Without regulation, life tends to become chaotic. Most importantly, regulation is the basis of steady *sādhana.* Without regulation, proper *sādhana* is impossible. For physical health also, it is good to sleep and rise, eat, evacuate, and shower at fixed times every day.

In our temples, devotional programs and *prasāda* timings are fixed; so if we simply follow the temple programs and take *prasāda* with the devotees, that much we will automatically be regulated.

It is more difficult to be regulated when traveling, but it is possible. Śrīla Prabhupāda followed a regulated schedule, despite constant travel.

Engagement

A pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa is satisfied to do any service for Kṛṣṇa, however menial it may appear to be. The *brahmacārī* is trained like that—to do whatever is asked of him. Even if he is highly qualified, a *brahmacārī* is always ready and willing to do the needful in Kṛṣṇa's service, including all kinds of humble services. The ideal *brahmacārī* performs all kinds of services quickly, efficiently, and cheerfully.

In the traditional *gurukula* system, young children are strictly disciplined. As they grow older, the guru engages them according to the propensities he has observed in them. Similarly, when a young man joins ISKCON, ideally he will take up any service he is asked to do. (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura would have new men wash pots, even if they were highly educated, just to test their sincerity.) But after some time, if he is not suitably engaged according to his psychophysical propensities, he may become dissatisfied. Indeed, if a *brahmacārī* is not absorbed in a devotional engagement, he will soon end up with another engagement that will keep him fully busy for many years—namely, a marriage engagement.

Begging for the guru is a traditional duty of *brahmacārīs*. "A *brahmacārī* is

trained up from the very beginning how to become a *sannyāsī* at the end of life. He is trained up by collecting alms for the guru." (Lecture, 05/04/74)

Fund raising for temple projects and maintenance is not the same as traditional *brahmacārī* begging, and some devotees opine that *brahmacārīs* should not be engaged thus. However, Śrīla Prabhupāda personally engaged *brahmacārīs* in collecting large sums of money. By begging alms, a *brahmacārī* learns humility. By offering all he collects to the guru, he fortifies the mood of slavery to the spiritual master. He practices sacrifice and detachment, and practically applies the maxim that "nothing belongs to me."

Although traditional-style begging is not always practical in the modern world, the ISKCON *brahmacārī's* alms collecting has been dovetailed with preaching through the most ingenious transcendental plan ever devised: book distribution.

By book distribution, the spiritual master, Lord Caitanya, Kṛṣṇa, and the whole *paramparā* are satisfied. The *karmīs* are benedicted, the book distributor is blessed, the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement expands, and *lakṣmī* is liberated for Kṛṣṇa's service. Book distribution is the ideal service for a *brahmacārī.*

Once when it was suggested that a leading *brahmacārī* book distributor be awarded *sannyāsa,* Śrīla Prabhupāda replied that it was not necessary because "He is doing more than any *sannyāsī* by personally distributing hundreds of books day after day and inspiring others to follow." (Letter, 05/06/74)

"Book distribution is definitely excellent training. One remains detached from material life by constantly seeing the temporary, miserable nature of the material world, while at the same time developing his faith in Kṛṣṇa consciousness by daily witnessing the extraordinary mercy of Lord Caitanya upon the fallen conditioned souls. And by having to defeat opposing arguments and convince others to take up spiritual life, one becomes a capable preacher." (Indradyumna Swami)

To go on a *saṅkīrtana* party is a great fortune for a *brahmacārī.* It is an intense, one-pointed mission—to pass out as many of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books as possible to the conditioned souls, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Such highly surrendered *saṅkīrtana* soldiers become powerful in austerity and concentration, and develop a solid, fixed-up foundation in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is recommended that new devotees in Kṛṣṇa consciousness spend at least their first two to four years in the movement engaged in *saṅkīrtana,* especially traveling *saṅkīrtana.* Whatever

they may do after that, their standing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will have been fixed, and it will help them to go on remembering Kṛṣṇa throughout their lives.

However, not every *brahmacārī* will go daily for book distribution. Some devotees just won't be able to adjust to it. But that is not a disqualification; there are plenty of other services that devotees can be happily engaged in. For instance, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "*Brahmaṇa brahmacārīs* are very nice for Deity worship." (Letter, 12/01/74)

But if *brahmacārīs* can preach, that is best. Preaching gives a taste and realization in Kṛṣṇa consciousness which *brahmacārīs* especially need to maintain the high level of renunciation which their *āśrama* requires. Ultimately, every service is preaching, because the whole Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is meant for preaching. But book distribution, *harināma saṅkīrtana*, college programs, and so on bring us directly into contact with nondevotees, giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This enables us to directly experience the shower of Lord Caitanya's mercy.

No one should get a superiority complex, however, for pride comes before a fall. It is not necessarily true that a *brahmacārī* out distributing books is more advanced than another staying back cleaning the floor. In the absolute sense, all services are equal. Kṛṣṇa accepts the service attitude of the devotee, not exactly the service externally performed.

Brahmacārīs are engaged in service by the guru or his representative. A sensitive guru or temple president will deal personally with the *brahmacārī* under his command, understanding that all are on different levels of advancement and surrender. Junior devotees especially need encouragement and guidance. Ours is a pushing movement, so pressure must be there. But the best leaders inspire enthusiasm in their followers. Force will not always stand. It is better to command respect rather than demand it.

As much as possible, *brahmacārīs* should be engaged so as to have as little dealings with women as possible. Outside of India, service in temple management brings *brahmacārīs* in contact with women in such a way that their *brahmacārī* principles are almost always compromised. Similarly, business is not at all a suitable engagement for *brahmacārīs.* Wheeling and dealing breeds the profit/loss mentality and makes for materialistic dealings with nondevotees and women. Devotees who get into moneymaking too often end up selling their souls. If anyone has to do business, let the *gṛhasthas* do it.

Ultimately, whatever engagement we are awarded, we can be happy to get the chance to do something for Kṛṣṇa. Devotional service is, after all, a privilege—it's not that we have anything wonderful to offer to Kṛṣṇa. But one way or another we have to keep busy in Kṛṣṇa's service, for an idle mind is the devil's workshop. There is always something to do. If not, a devotee should find something to do. He can help another devotee, read, chant, learn a *śloka,* or whatever. Devotees: do not be dull. Keep busy! Be alert! Be alive! Be Kṛṣṇa conscious! Keeping busy with mind, body, and words in Kṛṣṇa's service is the sure way to keep out of *māyā.*

Preaching

Attack is the best means of defense, and the most effective weapon against *māyā* is the preaching of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. By preaching, we not only strike against the *māyā* all around but also cleanse our hearts of the *māyā* within. "If one is not interested in preaching, talking constantly to nondevotees, the influence of the modes of nature is very difficult to surpass." (*SB* 7.9.46) Śrīla Prabhupāda: "For those who engage in the preaching of these two Vedic literatures (*Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*) it is very easy to get out of the illusory conditioned life imposed on us by *māyā.*" (*SB* 4.7.44)
So, *brahmacārīs,* get into the preaching mood. Preach to the *karmīs,* preach to the devotees, preach to yourself, preach to the walls. If we always think of how to spread this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, Lord Caitanya will surely protect us.
Śrīla Prabhupāda: "This Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement means preaching. Without preaching, one can have no taste. And without taste, you won't be able to go on with this Hari Hari Bol. If you don't preach, in a few years after I leave, there will be no more Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Because no one is preaching in the churches, they are all closing up. So why don't you get serious about this preaching work? Practically speaking, my Guru Mahārāja has invented this movement for that purpose. My ambition is that you make a revolution against this godless society. That is my mission. That is why I continue on, even at this advanced age. We want to guide everyone. So you

have to know my books. Read and preach—both things must be there—then you will have potency. Preaching means fighting." (Conversation, 12/12/73)

Traveling

Traveling and preaching in the association of *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* is a wonderful life. Detachment, dependence on Kṛṣṇa, simple living and high thinking, self-reliance, transcendental adventure, variety, gaining of experience, fun—it's all included in the package. A rolling stone gathers no moss—there is no question of developing relationships with women for a man on the move. A traveling *saṅkīrtana brahmacārī* will not even know the names of the *brahmacāriṇīs* in the temple, let alone what they look like. He won't be accumulating possessions either—how much can you keep in a nylon kit bag? Śrīla Prabhupāda: "*Brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* are meant for moving." (Conversation, 09/06/69) "For spiritually inclined persons, traveling is very good. You'll be more popular and there will be no difficulty; the mind will be steady." (Conversation, 15/08/71)

Health

"The highest goal of life can be achieved as long as one's body is stout and strong. We should therefore live in such a way that we keep ourselves always healthy and strong in mind and intelligence so that we can distinguish the goal of life from a life full of problems." (*SB* 7.6.5)
Brahmacarya is itself the best tonic for health. As Dhanvantari told his disciples, "*Brahmacarya* is truly a precious gem. It is the most effective medicine. It is nectar that destroys diseases, decay, and death. For attaining peace, luster, memory, knowledge, health, and self-realization, one should observe *brahmacarya*. *Brahmacarya* is the highest dharma, the highest knowledge, the greatest strength." Therefore, "A *brahmacārī* should not have

any complaint of bodily disease." (Letter, 17/02/69)
Health has become a special problem for the present generation, however, brought up as we were in junk-food ignorance and self-destructive indulgence. Some devotees respond to their health problems by neglect, hardly caring for the condition of their bodies. But this is akin to the Māyāvādī attitude that "I am not this body, and I have nothing to do with it." The Vaiṣṇava thinks, "This body is not mine. It belongs to Kṛṣṇa, and I have to serve Kṛṣṇa with it. It must be kept fit enough to serve Kṛṣṇa."
Śrīla Prabhupāda was concerned that his disciples maintain good health, and would often give detailed advice on diet and medication. He would sign off his letters, "Hoping this meets you in good health," because this body is meant for serving Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, "For the Vaiṣṇava, the protection of the body for the service of the Lord is a part of devotional service." (*Kṛṣṇa,* Ch. 87) As servants of Kṛṣṇa, we must see to our health without falling into the trap of becoming overly preoccupied with the physical at the expense of proper spiritual culture and development.
A balanced approach is needed. Devotees should have a basic knowledge of practical health care, should live and eat sensibly (taking regular temple *prasāda* at scheduled times), and should go on with devotional service, making whatever adjustments are necessary to maintain proper health. They should avoid being influenced by health food fads, unnecessary special diets, or speculative *karmī* infatuations with health.
Śrīla Prabhupāda: "A devotee should accept only those things that are favorable to keep his body and soul together and should reject those things that increase the demands of the body. Only the bare necessities for bodily maintenance should be accepted. By minimizing bodily necessities, one can primarily devote his time to the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the chanting of the holy names of God." (-*Teachings of Lord Caitanya,* Ch. 1)
"There is no possibility of one's becoming a yogi if one eats too much or eats too little, sleeps too much or does not sleep enough. He who is temperate in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system." (*Bg.* 6.16-17)

Eating

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda, sickness is usually caused by overeating,

uncleanness, and/or anxiety. Excess eating is the root cause of dozens of diseases. It also leads to excess sleeping, which is another obstacle to progressive devotional life. Overeating can refer to quality as well as quantity, for to regularly ingest rich foods is not good for health, what to speak of being unsuitable for *brahmacārīs*. "Disturbances from various diseases can be avoided by regulated diets." (*SB* 1.9.27)
Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses the importance of controlling the tongue in *brahmacarya* as follows.

> "In the *bhakti-mārga*, the path of devotional service, one must strictly follow the regulative principles by first controlling the tongue *(sevonmukhe hi jihvādau svayam eva sphuraty adaḥ)*. The tongue *(jihvā)* can be controlled if one chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, does not speak of any subjects other than those concerning Kṛṣṇa and does not taste anything not offered to Kṛṣṇa. If one can control the tongue in this way, *brahmacarya* and other purifying processes will automatically follow." (*SB* 6.1.13-14)

Traditionally, *brahmacārīs* are meant to be austere, especially in eating. Eating too much, or eating rich or heavy foods (i.e., foods with a high percentage of protein, butterfat, oil, or sugar, including honey, dried fruits and nuts), and very spicy food, make the senses strong and difficult to control. Everyone can practically experience this. Therefore such foods should be taken in small quantities only. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Devotees should eat as simply as possible. Otherwise, attachment for material things will gradually increase, and the senses, being very strong, will soon require more and more material enjoyment. Then the real business of life—to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness—will stop." (*SB* 4.18.10) "Especially for a devotee, too much eating is very, very bad." (Conversation, 14/07/74)
Milk is an important food for devotees. ("Milk means cow's milk.") (Conversation, 30/04/73) Milk nourishes the brain tissues which help one to understand spiritual knowledge. "One should take ample milk, and thus one can prolong one's life, develop his brain, execute devotional service, and ultimately gain the favor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (*SB* 8.6.12) "We have to make our brain very clean and for that we require to drink, not very much, one pound or half a pound of milk daily. That is essential." (Lecture, 15/01/74) Milk should be drunk very hot and slightly sweetened so as to be easily digested and beneficial to the brain. Taking too much milk is not good, though. When Śrīla Prabhupāda was told that some devotees drank lots

of milk with the intention of increasing their brain power, Prabhupāda said that drinking excess milk is *rājasika*. (Conversation, 14/07/74)

"The eating program should be nutritious and simple, not luxurious. That means *chapātīs*, *dāl*, vegetables, some butter, some fruits, and milk. This is necessary for keeping good health. But we should not indulge in sweetballs or *halava* or like that daily. Too much first-class eating may stimulate our sex desires, especially sweet preparations. Anyway, eat Kṛṣṇa *prasāda,* but be careful that we may not indulge in luxury. For Kṛṣṇa we can offer the most beautiful preparations, but for us *prasāda* should be very simple." (Letter, 20/11/69)

"Eating should be minimized. Too much eating leads to too much sleeping, and then sex desire." (Letter, 09/01/75)

Some devotees lament their inability to control the tongue while taking *prasāda*. But there is no reason for disappointment. By following the vow of taking only Kṛṣṇa *prasāda,* the tongue is already controlled inasmuch as it is restrained from all nonsense foods. And if we simply continue patiently with our devotional service, the tendency to overeat will automatically be overcome in course of time. Kṛṣṇa will help us.

Overeating of *prasāda* is not always a great vice, anyway. After all, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is "the kitchen religion." As *brahmacārīs,* we must try to control, but as devotees we know that it's better to take ten times too much *prasāda* rather than eat just the right amount of *bhoga*. Sometimes, in a festive mood, devotees even encourage each other to eat more and more. Even Lord Caitanya was doing that. In devotional service there is both austerity and festivity, and knowing when and how to apply them without being caught in *niyamāgrahaḥ* (NOI, Text 2) is an art to be learned by devotees. (Once in South India Prabhupāda was going to take *prasāda* in a Life Member's home. But Pradyumna, Prabhupāda's Sanskrit assistant, refused to eat on the plea of fasting. Prabhupāda said that his fasting was whimsical.) (Told by Basu Ghosh dāsa)

Our gurus, the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, ate next to nothing. They were so absorbed in serving Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa that they practically forgot to eat or sleep. There is no question of our imitating these great *ācāryas*. We simply have to follow in their footsteps by faithfully executing devotional service according to their instructions. (For more on eating and diet see the section on "Retention of Semen.")

Sleeping

Sleeping is a condition of the mode of ignorance; therefore devotees try to minimize it as far as possible. "One should not sleep more than six hours daily. One who sleeps more than six hours out of twenty-four is certainly influenced by the mode of ignorance." (*Bg.* 6.16) "A Kṛṣṇa conscious person is always alert in the discharge of his duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and therefore any unnecessary time spent sleeping is considered a great loss. A Kṛṣṇa conscious person cannot bear to pass a minute of his life without being engaged in the service of the Lord. Therefore his sleeping is kept to a minimum." (*Bg.* 6.17) "By spiritual culture one is able to conquer sleep." (*SB* 1.9.27)

Some devotees may be able to get by on five hours of sleep a day or less; some need six hours or more. Regulation—rising and resting at fixed times—helps to control sleep. Generally, one should sleep no more than six hours at a stretch. Day-time sleeping is traditionally not allowed for *brahmacārīs*, and should be minimized as much as possible. Rising before 4:00 a.m. is a must (Śrīla Prabhupāda insisted). Napping during the morning program should be avoided as much as possible, for that is when we need to be widest awake, to absorb transcendental sound. Splashing the face with cold water is advised for devotees who feel sleepy during the morning program.

To want to work hard, putting in long hours in Kṛṣṇa's service, is good. But remember, eighteen wide-awake hours are better than twenty hours half awake. (Drivers especially note: don't drive if tired!) Those who find themselves regularly struggling through the morning program should probably arrange to take rest earlier at night, or if that is not possible, to take a little rest in the day.

Sleeping in a secluded place is not good, especially for neophyte devotees. Like eating alone, the tendency is to take it as sense gratification and overdo it. Before and after sleeping, offer obeisances to your spiritual master, remembering that the purpose of rest is only to recuperate energy for serving him. And on rising, remember to roll up your bedding and put it away tidily.

It is best for *brahmacārīs* to sleep on a thin mat, not a mattress. In India, grass sleeping mats are available, and in the West, synthetic rubber or foam. The latter also help to keep out the cold from the floor. In India in winter, a mattress may be required to serve the same purpose. Those who suffer from

bodily pain may also require a mattress. Mattresses should be thin. Thick, luxury mattresses are not meant for *brahmacārīs*.
(More on sleeping in the section "Retention of Semen.")

Exercise

Śrīla Prabhupāda was not much in favor of exercise, but he was not wholly against it either. So if devotees feel the need for a few minutes of exercise daily, there should be no objection. Peoples' needs for exercise vary greatly in terms of their age, health and general proclivities. But in general, if devotees are physically active, they should not need an elaborate exercise program. Dancing in *kīrtana* and walking while chanting *japa* automatically exercise the body, even without thinking about it. Devotees are advised to exercise moderately; otherwise bodily consciousness will increase. Listening to a Prabhupāda *bhajana* or lecture cassette while exercising will help keep us on the Kṛṣṇa conscious platform, as opposed to the bodily platform. Heavy exercise at night is not recommended, as it increases the heat and activity of the body at a time when it should be winding down.

Physique

Śrīla Prabhupāda once remarked that a devotee named Ṛṣi Kumāra had the ideal physique for a *brahmacārī*. He was of medium build, with a little soft fat—not pudgy, not skinny, and not muscular. (Told by Jayādvaita Swami) Of course, we can't change our basic bodily structure, but to become fat is especially bad for devotees. (*SB* 4.28.36) Yet also, to become thin and starved like the yogis is not our process. Śrīla Prabhupāda would become concerned if he saw that any of his disciples were underweight and would insist that they eat sufficiently. (Told by Śatadhanya dāsa) And *brahmacārīs* definitely shouldn't endeavor to develop a muscular torso. Anyone who wants to imitate Mr. Universe is obviously highly illusioned by the bodily concept of life and is a long way from even beginning to understand the first instruction of *Bhagavad-gītā:* "You're not that body." Similarly, sunbathing to get a nice tan, or any such activity for making the body attractive, is simply *māyā*.

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is an elaborate part of Vedic culture. External purity is a prerequisite for developing internal purity. If we can't even keep our bodies and surroundings clean, then how can we hope to remove the dirt encrusted on our hearts since time immemorial? "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If you are not clean, Kṛṣṇa will remain a thousand miles away." Prabhupāda wanted "revolutionary cleanliness." (Letter, 28/02/72) Cleanliness is *sāttvika* and healthy; uncleanness is *tāmasika* and intolerable. Vedic culture requires that *brahmacārīs* be clean. Indeed, one of the symptoms of degradation in Kali-yuga predicted in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is that "*Brahmacārīs* will be unclean." (*SB* 12.3.33) Let's not be that kind of *brahmacārī.*

External cleanliness necessitates taking full bath three times daily (morning, noon, and evening) or at least twice a day, or absolute minimum once on rising. It is not necessary to use soap every time, as water alone is purifying. Bathing is compulsory after passing stool. While bathing, quickly clean under the skin flap on the penis so that scum cannot accumulate there.

Once used, a towel or *gāmcha* (a light bathing cloth commonly used in India) is contaminated and should be washed. To dry off with an unclean towel is like the elephant's bathing—one simply becomes contaminated again. *Gāmchas* dry quicker than towels and are therefore practical for devotees. To wash a *gāmcha* with soap after each shower is not necessary—a thorough rinse in clean water will do. But do wash it with soap regularly, and certainly don't let it get to the point of smelling bad.

After urinating, wash traces of urine off the penis with water from a *loṭā* (as Prabhupāda always did), then wash the hands (with soap, Prabhupāda said), and rinse the feet. Wash the hands after touching anything impure (such as the mouth, nostrils, feet, or any dirty thing).

Teeth, ears, and nails need to be kept clean, the tongue scraped daily, nails trimmed, and face and head regularly shaved. Hair is produced from the body's waste matter and thus resembles stool. Regular shaving not only helps us look clean but also helps us to feel clean and clear-headed. Clothes, bead-bags (Prabhupāda said to keep two), sacred thread, shoes, the *brahmacārī-āśrama,* vehicles—everything must be kept neat and clean. A lot can be understood about a person by observing how clean and tidy he is. Śrīla Prabhupāda was

always clean—a spotless transcendental aristocrat.
Of course, external cleanliness without internal cleanliness is useless. For internal cleanliness, chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and don't think of sex.

Retention of Semen

Retention of semen is so essential in progressive human life that it is simply astounding how the whole endeavor of modern civilization is based on discharging it as much as possible. Semen retained in the body goes upwards to nourish the brain, rendering the body robust and the memory and intellect sharp. Determination, optimism, confidence, will-power, fixed intelligence, noble character, photographic memory, and shining good health are all fruits of conserved semen. It is said that the four Kumāras were unwilling to adopt materialistic activities because they were highly elevated due to their semens' flowing upwards *(ūrdhva-retasaḥ)*. (*SB* 3.12.4)
Scientists have analyzed semen to be amazingly rich in hormones, proteins, vitamins, minerals, ions, enzymes, trace elements, and other vital substances. By nature's arrangement, this substance, when mixed with the ovum, is sufficient for the procreation of a new body. By nature's arrangement also, if it is not used for procreation but is kept within, it nourishes the body and brain in a way impossible for any tonic or dietary aid to emulate. The current craze for vitamin and mineral supplements is an attempt to make up for self-imposed deficiencies. Most people don't know that they are passing out their very life energy with that essential bodily fluid. If semen is lost, all bodily and sensory functions are weakened. Repeated loss of semen spoils the determination and clear, *sāttvika* intelligence necessary for spiritual understanding. However, if semen is retained in the body, there develops what Āyurveda refers to as *ojas*, a vital fluid that gives strength, luster, enhanced mental abilities and immunity to diseases, and slows the aging process.
Scientists cannot prove or disprove this, but it is observable in the brightness of yogis and the dullness of those who regularly "spill their brains out."
Retention of semen, then, is ultimately meant for the evolution of the human being to higher levels of spiritual consciousness. Simply by retaining semen in

the body, one develops a tendency towards greatness.

On the other hand, those who are addicted to discharging semen become petty and bestially lusty. The disastrous fruits of their promiscuity await them. They will be forced to devolve into lower species of life. Even in this life, excessive seminal loss can lead to physical and mental weakness. As the body ages, vitality and the will to get things done ebb away, and perpetual tiredness sets in. The pills and intoxicants people take to artificially keep them bright and active further add to their physical and mental degeneration. As premature old age sets in, their exhausted bodies cannot resist the dozens of diseases which proceed to ravage every cell in their organism. For such persons, the all-too-common senility comes as a relief. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The more one enjoys in youth, the more he suffers in old age." (*SB* 4.28.1)

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Wasting semen is also illicit sex." (*SB* 7.12, Introduction)

"The faculty to discharge semen is the cause of death. Therefore, yogis and transcendentalists who want to live for greater spans of life voluntarily restrain themselves from discharging semen. The more one can restrain the discharge of semen, the more one can be aloof from the problem of death. There are many yogis living up to three hundred or seven hundred years by this process, and in the *Bhāgavatam* it is clearly stated that discharging semen is the cause of horrible death. The more one is addicted to sexual enjoyment, the more susceptible he is to a quick death." (*SB* 3.26.57)

Therefore, *brahmacārīs* are trained not to squander their semen. They must resist the temporary feeling of gratification that is bought at the cost of their own life energy.

Unfortunately, almost all devotees coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness never had such training—rather, the opposite. And for those who regularly discharged semen, it will be difficult to stop the downward flow. But we have to try. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Everyone should be taught to be very careful not to discharge semen unnecessarily. This is very important for all human beings." (*SB* 7.11.8-12) Here are a few hints that will help.

First and foremost: don't think of women. Lustful thoughts provoke activity in the sexual glands. If we think of sex, we shouldn't be surprised if we suffer a nocturnal discharge.

But even a devotee seriously striving for *brahmacarya* may nevertheless be tormented by sex dreams. In the waking state he can control his mind with good intelligence, but in dreams low desires deeply ingrained in his

subconsciousness may become manifest. The real cure for this is complete purification of consciousness by devotional service, but as this may take some time, the several physical factors that affect the retention of semen may be taken into consideration.

It is important not to excessively raise the internal heat of the body. Āyurveda describes internal heat as a condition of excess *pitta* (bile) that is associated with the mode of passion, experienced as heat in the body generated by a passionate mood or by eating hot *rājasika* food such as that with much chili powder. Āyurveda also cautions putting downward pressure on the genitals by packing the stomach with food.

Diet and eating habits, therefore, are very important. Transcendentalists should eat simply (See section on "Eating" under "Health") and moderately. By overeating, more energy is taken into the body than it can use, which tends to make it come out in the form of seminal discharge. And an overly filled belly exerts pressure on the genitals, causing a tendency towards seminal discharge.

Avoid sleeping with a full belly—a yogi practices not eating at night. The last meal should be taken at least 2-3 hours before sleeping. The food should be light and easily digestible. Even hot milk should not be taken immediately before retiring, but about half an hour before. Rich, heavy, fried, spicy, and sweet foods heat the body, so be cautious with them, especially at night. Sour foods (such as sour or acidic fruit and yogurt) and bitter foods should be avoided at night, as should sweets, cheese, and thick milk preparations. Milk that has gone even slightly sour should not be taken at night.

Some vegetables contain a substance that thins the semen, making it prone to discharge. Worst among them is eggplant. The skin of eggplant is especially bad. Next worst is green chilies. Traditional Śrī Vaiṣṇavas exclude chilies, tamarind, and drumsticks (a type of vegetable) from their diet because of their sexually stimulating effect. Carrots, drumsticks, and to a lesser extent beetroot, heat the semen and therefore make it prone to discharge. However, this effect is not very pronounced, and *brahmacārīs* can take these vegetables in moderate quantities.

It is best to sleep no more than six hours at night and minimally or not at all during the day. If one cannot rise early, his so-called practice of *brahmacarya* is simply a farce. And late nights are bad for overall health as well as for seminal retention. So best is early to bed and early to rise. Sleeping during the

brahma-muhūrta, at dawn or dusk, or when not really tired, are also dangerous—there's a high seminal loss risk. When a person is actually tired, his sleep will be deep, and disturbance from dreams will be less likely—another good reason for devotees to minimize sleep.

Some Āyurvedic authorities recommend sleeping on the right side as best for *brahmacarya*. Next best is the left side, not so good is on the back, and absolutely bad for health and dangerous for seminal discharge is sleeping on the stomach. Sleep with the back more or less straight (not curled up) and with the hands away from the genital area. If you are a light sleeper, try to rest in such a place that you won't be disturbed. Before resting, pass all water out of the bladder, wash hands and feet with cool water, and dry them.

Constipation is a major factor behind nocturnal emission. If the bowels are not cleared daily, stool and associated toxins accumulate in the rectum or colon. This increases the *pitta* (heat) in the area and also exerts pressure on the seminal sac, facilitating the excretion of semen. However, straining when passing stool should be avoided, as this also exerts pressure on the seminal sac.

Other points: Bathing with cool (not very cold) water is better than with hot. Or use warm water first to get clean then finish with cold. Bucket bath is more effective than showering to cool the body. Pouring plenty of cool water over the whole genital area may be done as a daily practice. Rinsing the penis after urination removes uric acid that can agitate the sexual gland. Fasting as completely as possible on *Ekādaśī* is supposed to help. There are several Āyurvedic medicines and *yogāsanas* which are specifically meant to enhance *brahmacarya,* and although Śrīla Prabhupāda never recommended them, that does not necessarily mean that we cannot use them—although they may not work wonders. *Triphalā* (usually taken as *Triphalā Churna*) is a well-known, inexpensive Āyurvedic medicine that is helpful for many conditions and is good for *brahmacarya*. Licorice (Sanskrit: *Yaṣṭi-madhu*), taken regularly, can help prevent seminal discharge. However, it is best yo take raw licorice rather than in the form of commercially prepared sweets. Āyurvedic treatment may help if one can find a good doctor and follow his instructions strictly over an extended period of time; but this should not be necessary for most devotees.

At least once, when Śrīla Prabhupāda saw a devotee shaking his legs while sitting cross-legged, he stopped him. Such leg-shaking is a sign of mental agitation and further agitates the genitals.

In a *Bhāgavatam* class in Melbourne, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "If one can just

retain his semen up to age twenty-five, the brain becomes *so* fertile for spiritual realization." Then, looking around and seeing all the depressed faces, he continued, "But if you just chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, everything will be alright anyway." (Quoted by Bhūrijana dāsa)

It's Kali-yuga; we're all fallen. Many devotees have lost semen so many times in their pre-devotional lives that even though they want to, they can't stop their bodies involuntarily discharging it now. Even serious devotees who are averse to losing semen may nevertheless inadvertently do so, due to external influences on the body and mind, such as residual contamination from pre-devotional life, physical disorders that render the body weak, bodily heat, and subtle contaminations through eating the food of sinful people.

There is no cause for excessive lamentation if loss of semen is not a result of a conscientious endeavor for or meditation on sex. Inadvertent discharge of semen may be as accidental (and undesirable) as, for instance, the loss of a tooth. Considering that the body is always producing semen, occasional spillage may be taken as natural overflow. *Śāstra* gives rituals for physical and mental purification for such accidental emissions, although for ISKCON *brahmacārīs,* bathing and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa is sufficient. In such cases, *brahmacārīs* need not be blamed for breaking the principles or not practicing them properly.

Still, the less it happens the better, and *brahmacārīs,* besides engaging in directly devotional practices, must try to control seminal loss by whatever methods they can easily adopt. They should be mindful about what, when, how much and where they eat, their sleeping habits, who they talk with and listen to, their posture while sleeping and sitting, and their overall physical health. They may also take to physical exercises or yoga if it genuinely helps their *brahmacārī* life.

Despite all endeavors, if a *brahmacārī* still loses semen, he may feel disgusted, but should know that it is not a disqualification for devotional service. The real qualification of a *brahmacārī* is that he wants to surrender his life to Kṛṣṇa and thus be free of sex life forever. Such determination transcends any material conditions, for Kṛṣṇa helps those who are sincere. *Brahmacārīs* suffering from nocturnal emissions may take comfort in knowing that they are by no means alone with this problem. Let us all chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and pray for the mercy of Lord Caitanya, the savior of the fallen.

The following quote from Śrīla Prabhupāda may be applied to unwanted

seminal discharges. "(A devotee) is callous toward incidental occurrences, but he is always alert to execute his duties in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or *bhakti-yoga.* Accidents never deviate him from his duty. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.14), *āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata.* He endures all such incidental occurrences because he knows that they come and go and do not affect his duties. In this way he achieves the highest perfection in yoga practice." (*Bg.* 6.20-23)

The Appearance and Dress of a Brahmacārī

"Carrying pure *kuśa* grass in his hand, the *brahmacārī* should dress regularly with a belt of straw and with deerskin garments. He should wear matted hair, carry a rod and waterpot and be decorated with a sacred thread, as recommended in the *śāstras*." (*SB* 7.12.4)

This is Nārada Muni's description of a *brahmacārī's* apparel. Śrīla Prabhupāda, the *ācārya* for the modern age in the line of Nārada Muni, dressed his *brahmacārīs* in saffron and had them shave their heads.

ISKCON *brahmacārīs* should have a shaved head with *śikhā*, and *tilaka* markings on twelve places of the body; wear saffron cloth; wear a *kaupīna*; be simple, neat, and clean; and look blissful.

Shaved head, *śikhā*, *tilaka*, and saffron robes are, after all, the very signs of a devotee *brahmacārī*. We're famous for it. Never mind what people think (and often it's not nearly as bad as some devotees imagine), if they see a devotee in Vaiṣṇava dress, they think, "That's a Hare Kṛṣṇa" and thus make a little spiritual advancement.

If we're bold enough to always present ourselves as devotees, eventually we'll be accepted on our own terms. Sometimes it may be necessary for a devotee to wear *karmī* clothes. But if we make a habit of disguising ourselves, people will think we have something to hide. Therefore, as much as possible devotees should present themselves straightforwardly as devotees.

Dressing as a Vaiṣṇava is good for us, too. It helps us to feel like we are devotees—we are different from materialistic people, and that's the way we want to be. When we go out into the material world, we'll have to remember

that we are representing Prabhupāda and ISKCON, and behave accordingly. Dressed as Vaiṣṇavas, we often provoke questions which get us preaching to people who might otherwise never speak to a devotee.

Dressing as devotees also acts as a shield against indulgence in sense gratification. *Karmī* dress is dangerous—a subtle license to do things we could not in dhoti and *kurtā*. For instance, *brahmacārīs* are usually young, healthy, and bright, and therefore attractive to women; but a lot less so if they're shaven-headed, with *tilaka* and saffron robes. The ultimate argument for wearing devotee clothes and *tilaka,* with shaved head and *śikhā,* is simply that Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted us to do so.

Devotees who are obliged to wear *karmī* clothes in the course of performing devotional service should not become habituated to them. The best thing is, on returning to the *āśrama,* to immediately shower, apply *tilaka,* and don devotee clothes. For attendance in temple programs, there should be no question of wearing *karmī* clothes. For male and female devotees to regularly and unnecessarily be around each other in *karmī* clothes tends to create an unchaste atmosphere and should be avoided.

Hair means attachment, so unless it is really necessary to keep some hair, *brahmacārīs* should shave their heads once a week, once a fortnight, or absolute minimum once a month.* Saffron cloth with long hair looks incongruous—the color of renunciation with the symptoms of attachment. The face should also be kept clean-shaved, with no stubble, sideburns, or mustaches. It is good to keep the armpits shaved also, especially in hot climates where shirts are not always worn, and for devotees who go on the altar.

The *śikhā* should be small (Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava *śikhā* is an inch and a half across—no bigger. Bigger *śikhā* means another *sampradāya.*") (Conversation, 05/05/72) and knotted. It should not be braided or allowed to become matted.

Just keep as many clothes as you need—say three sets of devotee clothes and, if necessary, some *karmī* clothes. Don't build up a wardrobe—that is *atyāhāraḥ,* over-collecting, and is detrimental to devotional advancement. (NOI, Text 2)

Householders wear white, and *brahmacārīs* and *sannyāsīs* saffron. So the two should not be mixed up. Devotees should wear one or the other, and make it clear which *āśrama* they are in. Traditionally, saffron is the color of *sannyāsa,* renunciation. It should not be worn as a fashion, but by those responsible enough to uphold the seriousness it implies.

Clothes should not be dyed too red. Dark red cloth is worn by Māyāvādīs and worshippers of Śiva and Kālī. And devotees wearing saffron look better if all their clothes are of the same shade—not that their dhoti is pale pink and their *kurtā* bright orange.

Some *brahmacārīs* opt to wear white, considering the saffron dress and the responsibility that goes with it unsuitable for them in their present state of consciousness. They may have decided to get married, or are tending towards marriage, but have no immediate plan to actually enter into marriage. Or they may consider their consciousness too contaminated or their approach to devotional service insufficiently strict to merit their wearing of saffron. On the whole, it is better that those who are neither married nor strictly practicing renunciation wear white and not misrepresent themselves as renunciates. Certainly no one who accepts payment for services rendered should dare to don saffron.

When buying socks, *cādaras*, jackets, scarves, or hats, if pink or orange are not available, beige, brown, gray, or maroon are also acceptable. Red, white, yellow, and even black are also possible colors for auxiliary clothing for *brahmacārīs;* green, blue, and multicolored are best avoided.

Brahmacārīs wear a full-length dhoti with a *kacha* (the piece tucked in at the back). To go without a *kaccha* is for *sannyāsīs* only. Similarly, the saffron knotted top-piece, whether worn to the front or to the side, is only for *sannyāsīs*. However, there is no restriction on householders, especially those engaged in *pūjārī* service, sometimes wearing a white knotted top-piece.

Kaupīnas aid in sense control by regulating certain nerves that can otherwise cause agitation. They should be worn firmly, but not so tight as to hurt. *Kaupīnas* are practical for *brāhmaṇas* taking bath three times daily, because they dry quickly. They are also cheap. It is unfortunate that many of our devotees prefer to wear *karmī* underpants. The *kaupīna* should be tucked in at the back, not sticking out like a monkey's tail. *Kaupīnas* should be made of two pieces of cloth. The width should be equal to the distance between the two nipples, and the length should be equal to the girth of the waist plus two fists. According to *śāstra,* the part that goes around the waist should be knotted on the right side.

T-shirts with nondevotional themes are useless and unnecessary for devotees. When wearing a T-shirt with the holy names or a devotional motif printed on it, or a *harināma cādara,* be careful when paying obeisances not to touch them

to the ground. And better not wash them (or your bead-bag) in a toilet-cum-bathroom, or along with socks, *kaupīnas* or other contaminated articles.

A *brahmacārī* dresses simply and neatly and keeps himself and his cloth clean. In certain preaching circumstances there may be justification for "fancy dress," but generally simple cotton dhoti and *kurtā* are most suitable for *brahmacārīs.* But we should not look like poverty-stricken beggars. Badly torn or soiled cloth should be replaced. And we must have some kind of footwear. If we go barefoot people will take us for hippies. And, for preaching in formal situations, it is best that clothes be ironed.

Dress sensibly. If it's cold, wear warm clothes. Especially the feet should be kept warm. Wear socks while standing or walking on cold floors.

Rings, bracelets, expensive watches, designer sunglasses, embroidered *kurtās*, and dhotis with fancy borders are generally signs of someone who is promoting his body, or in other words, trying to attract women. *Gṛhasthas* may or may not use them, and no one is likely to say anything, but they are not suitable for *brahmacārīs.* The same goes for strongly scented after-shave, deodorants, and soaps.

Sometimes it is postulated that people may be attracted by a show of opulence. That is especially true in poor countries, and therefore Śrīla Prabhupāda built gorgeous temples in India. Our preachers in India often wear expensive cloth, just to create a good impression. But sometimes a display of opulence backfires—people mistake us for materialists in the garb of *sādhus.* And factually, unless we have sufficient realization, simply wearing silk won't make us preachers.

Śrīla Prabhupāda stressed that our greatest asset is our purity. So, devotees should always look blissful. (Have a look through the real old BTG's—you'll be amazed to see dozens of dazzling devotee photos.) Śrīla Prabhupāda: "It is essential that a *brahmacārī* engaged in spiritual advancement look very healthy and lustrous." (*SB* 3.21.47) If a devotee looks dull and morose we can understand that he is not relishing devotional service, but is contemplating sense gratification. The face is the index of the mind.

We can't fake it, and if we try, we'll look ridiculous. Cutting a profile never made anybody into a *brahmacārī.* But if we've got it, our genuine bliss is the best advertisement for Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Nakedness

Nakedness is not at all appreciated in Vedic culture. (*SB* 9.14.22-3) The private parts should remain unexposed at all times. A *brahmacārī* should as much as possible avoid seeing even his own genitals. To see the private parts of the body is not only vulgar, but tends to stimulate unwanted desires. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "To see oneself naked is the beginning of madness." (-Spoken to Upendra dāsa, 1976) Even if alone in a room, one should not for a moment be exposed. That includes while bathing, while changing, and even while sleeping.

While bathing, wear a *gāmcha*. Simply a *kaupīna* is insufficient. After bathing, hold a dry *gāmcha* with one hand around the now wet one and take off the wet one with the other hand (sounds complex but it's simple—standard practice in India). Rinse and firmly wring out the wet one, then dry yourself with it (most of the water gets absorbed, body heat does the rest). This is the way that Śrīla Prabhupāda bathed. Indeed, millions of Indians still bathe like this every day—the majority of them outdoors, at a well, tank, or river. Still, they never expose their private parts, even to the elements.

To change, keep a dhoti or *gāmcha* wrapped around the waist until the cloth you're changing into is in position. And while sleeping wear at least *kaupīnas* and *gāmcha*. *Gāmchas* should be at least knee length, for the sake of decency. Those from a Western background may find this all rather peculiar at first. But to remain covered is not at all difficult—one just has to become aware of the necessity. It's all a part of the Vedic heritage, which expounds proper standards of behavior for an actually cultured civilization. Just as on becoming a vegetarian one comes to realize how abominable meat-eating is, or on coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness a devotee comes to understand how meaningless life without Kṛṣṇa is, so to one who learns to cover himself up, not doing so, even for a few seconds while changing, seems uncouth.

The General Behavior and Disposition of a Brahmacārī

Every being is an individual. All the rules and regulations in the world can't snuff out a person's individuality. So despite the *brahmacārī's* adherence to a strict regime, there are all kinds of characters in the *brahmacārī-āśrama.* Eccentricity is not uncommon amongst those who strive for the extraordinary, and *brahmacārīs* are no exception. Everyone has idiosyncrasies, and these become more apparent when we live lives of constant endeavor with little or no privacy—there are quite a few singular devotees around! Such variety adds spice to our already interesting lives in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Zaniness, however, is not the standard. The standard is, as Śrīla Prabhupāda said, that a devotee be a perfect gentleman.

Below are a few guidelines on the behavior of an ideal *brahmacārī.* If you don't exactly fit the description, don't worry—hardly anyone does. We are all struggling with the modes of material nature on different rungs of the ladder of spiritual advancement. But make the effort to reach the standard of excellence. Take lessons and inspiration from the activities and dealings of great devotees like the six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana and Śrīla Prabhupāda. If you observe any good qualities in a devotee, be he a *sannyāsī* or a new *bhakta*, learn from him. Try, try, try.

Submission to and friendship with the guru are the directing principles in the life of a *brahmacārī.* (*SB* 7.12.1) He always tries to avoid doing anything which would displease his guru, who he worships as a pure representative of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *guru-paramparā.* In his dealings with others he is straightforward and fair, being ever conscious that he is representing his guru. Thus a *brahmacārī* is *suśīlāḥ sādhavaḥ*, a well-behaved saintly person. (*SB* 6.1.17) He does not try to draw attention to himself. He is self-satisfied, jolly, and confident—never morose. So naturally everyone—even the nondevotees—like him. The six Gosvāmīs were dear to both the gentle and the ruffians because they were never envious of anyone. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote that, "In our common dealings we should maintain friendship with everyone." (*SB* 4.11.34) (Then what to speak of with devotees.)

Nārada Muni describes *brahmacārīs* as *dāsavan nīcaḥ*: very humble, submissive, and obedient, like a slave. (*SB* 7.12.1) If a *brahmacārī* is not obedient, there is no meaning to his being a *brahmacārī. Brahmacārīs* should be prepared to work hard, undergo austerities, accept discipline, and surrender. It is somewhat understandable (although not very good) if a householder is not very surrendered. But for a *brahmacārī* not to be so is an aberration. If a *brahmacārī*,

especially a junior *brahmacārī*, is not prepared to surrender, be disciplined, and accept authority, he is no *brahmacārī* at all and is not fit to live in an *āśrama*. Too much independence is not good, especially for *brahmacārīs* newly joining the *āśrama*. A newcomer should be prepared to buckle under and do what he is told without complaining. By following this disciplinary process, the sense of surrender becomes fixed and strong. Such a *brahmacārī* can be relied upon to do well in any conditions.

Brahmacārīs are traditionally meant for service, not to be served, so *brahmacārīs* should not expect or demand service from others. Rather, they should be eager to serve others. Specifically, *brahmacārīs* traditionally act as assistants to *sannyāsīs*. A *brahmacārī* should be reluctant to accept service from others, especially on a regular basis, and certainly should not have a personal servant. An exception may be a *brahmacārī* who has been engaged in devotional service over many years and is physically incapacitated in old age. Even then, such a personal servant should not be a godbrother or one on the level of a godbrother.

The ideal *brahmacārī* dedicates his life for spiritual advancement and always endeavors to be self-controlled and detached from material enjoyment. However, he is not mindlessly fanatical and does not condemn devotees who do not follow as strictly as he does. He is not ignorant or naive or a ball of passion, but conducts himself in the mode of goodness, as a *brāhmaṇa*.

Steadiness is the bedrock of *brahmacārī* life. Having in the beginning accepted training in the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, a serious *brahmacārī* maintains continued, firm adherence to those standards throughout his life.

If a devotee is following all the principles and serving nicely (as all good *brahmacārīs* do), *māyā* will try to trick him into being falsely proud, into thinking himself better than other devotees. We should consider that even if we are doing well now, we have no guarantee that we shall be able to consistently maintain such a high standard. Many devotees before us have advanced dramatically, only to fall due to offenses caused by false pride. Genuine and steady advancement must be accompanied by humility, for pride goes before a fall.

Brahmacarya as Student Life

Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted *gurukulas*, to give children the opportunity to easily perfect their lives and go back home, back to Godhead. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If one practices devotional service from the beginning of his life, surely he will return home, back to Godhead, without a doubt." (*SB* 9.9.42) Whatever deficiencies ISKCON *gurukulas* may have had, they are special because they are centered around Kṛṣṇa. Because Śrīla Prabhupāda saw the modern schools as indoctrinating the helpless children in sense gratification and mental speculation, he called the schools "slaughterhouses." (Conversation, 09/07/73) What about the rest of us, who joined ISKCON in youth or later? Can we become students of Kṛṣṇa consciousness? The answer is yes—we *must* become serious devotee students. Traditionally, *brahmacārīs* studied Vedic knowledge under the guidance of their guru and rendered him menial service. Both elements are there for ISKCON *brahmacārīs* also. The aspects of study and training should never be minimized. The guru accepts service from a disciple simply to make him a candidate worthy of receiving Vedic knowledge. Unless there is an awakening of transcendental knowledge within the heart of the devotee, there is no meaning to the guru-disciple relationship. That knowledge is contained within the scriptures, and Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us, in straightforward language, the deepest mysteries of spiritual understanding in his Bhaktivedanta purports. But the ability of the student to actually comprehend the message of the scriptures depends on his being favored by a bona fide spiritual master.

Gradually, many new books on Kṛṣṇa consciousness are being published in English, and Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted that. However, Prabhupāda's books are the basis of our movement. Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us plenty to read. The philosophy is nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa: vast and unlimited. "Even if we read the entire *Bhagavad-gītā* every day, all eighteen chapters, in each reading we shall find a new explanation. That is the nature of transcendental literatures." (*SB* 7.14.8)

Before going on from the *brahmacārī-āśrama* to the *gṛhastha-* or *sannyāsa-āśramas*, the *brahmacārī* should have a proper understanding of Śrīla

Prabhupāda's books. Every devotee must have at least a basic understanding of the philosophy. Otherwise his Kṛṣṇa consciousness will not develop properly. If a *brahmacārī* doesn't have a taste for Vedic knowledge, what is the meaning of his being a *brahmacārī?* If, on the other hand, a *brahmacārī* makes a habit of carefully and regularly studying Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, that will be sufficient to make his life successful.

In addition to philosophy, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a transcendental kaleidoscope of culture, art, and science. Those who take the trouble to learn any aspect will be enriched. Everyone has latent abilities, so why not develop some talents to use in Kṛṣṇa's service? As stated by Nārada Muni, a *brahmacārī* should be *dakṣa*, expert. *(SB* 7.12.6) Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborated on this by stating that a *brahmacārī* should be expert in everything. (Told by Prabhaviṣṇu Swami)

As far as possible, every devotee should learn to give class, receive guests, preach, quote Sanskrit *ślokas*, cook, perform fundamental Deity worship, lead a *kīrtana,* sing *bhajanas,* and play the *mṛdaṅga.* And there are other abilities which are useful for all-rounder *brahmacārīs* in the modern age to learn, such as basic vehicle maintenance, computer skills, and elementary accounting. Devotees should know and apply Vedic etiquette (appropriate use of right and left hands, not stepping over books, etc.) and codes of health and hygiene.* They should be self-reliant in every way, from washing their clothes and keeping themselves and their quarters clean, to looking after themselves in any situation. So devotees who come to our movement have to be trained. The junior *brahmacārīs* of today are the senior *brahmacārīs* of tomorrow. Today's trainee is tomorrow's teacher.

If you have the inclination to excel in any aspect of devotional service, take permission from your authorities and go ahead, get into it. One of the duties of gurus and Kṛṣṇa conscious leaders is to guide the *brahmacārī* according to his inclination so that he will always be productive and happy. So take guidance and become an expert speaker, cook, *pūjārī,* or whatever, for Kṛṣṇa. Learn to play harmonium or *mṛdaṅga* nicely; learn hundreds of *ślokas*. If from pre-Kṛṣṇa conscious life you have some extra expertise, for instance, in gardening, art, or computers, by all means develop that skill in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Learn something, do something for Kṛṣṇa, and train others to do it also. Make your life successful in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Don't go away feeling unfulfilled, thinking that *karmī* life can offer anything which Kṛṣṇa consciousness cannot.

Whatever propensity we have can be satisfied in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The Brahmacārī-āśrama (Residence)

The *brahmacārī* quarters may be dormitory type or divided into smaller rooms. In either case, it's better if the *brahmacārīs* all stay together in one area. Staying alone or having too much privacy is never recommended for devotees. The tendency is to oversleep or otherwise fall into *māyā*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once walked into the *brahmacārī* room (10.8 x 3.5 meters) in Hyderabad and said, "Forty *brahmacārīs* can stay in here." The devotees were stunned and thought Śrīla Prabhupāda was joking, but he wasn't. (Told by Ānandamaya dāsa)

The *brahmacārī-āśrama* should, obviously, be far away from the *brahmacāriṇī* and householder areas, and, preferably, close to the temple. There should be adequate toilet and bathing facilities so that everyone can conveniently get to *maṅgala-ārati* on time.

A full set of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books should be available, or better still, there should be a separate library-cum-study. (Too many of our temples still don't provide this important facility. Devotees, especially *brahmacārīs*, give up everything to serve Kṛṣṇa. If at all possible they should have a place where they can go to peacefully absorb themselves in Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.)

In the early days of ISKCON, devotees didn't used to sleep on beds, but they are standard fittings in many of our *āśramas* nowadays. Beds aren't necessarily a bad thing (although *brahmacārīs* traditionally aren't supposed to use them), but personally I don't see the advantage to having them. Apart from costing money, they take up valuable space and provide a constant temptation to be used. Besides, soft mattresses are bad for health. Sleeping on the floor is conducive to the *brahmacārī* ideals of simplicity and austerity. A *brahmacārī* doesn't need any special arrangement—he can take rest anywhere. A bed is just something else to get attached to. On rising, a *brahmacārī* rolls up his bedding neatly, puts it away (out of sight, out of mind) and sponges the floor where he slept. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "A *brahmacārī* lies down on the floor." (Lecture, 01/11/72)

Pictures on the *brahmacārī* room walls (or anywhere else, for that matter) should be properly framed, not just ripped out of a magazine and stuck up haphazardly with sticky tape. Don't sleep with your feet toward them! Mirrors are anathema for *brahmacārīs*, so just keep a small one on the wall so the boys can put their *tilaka* on nicely.

The *brahmacārī-āśrama* must be kept neat and clean. That means sweeping out and washing with water every day. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If devotees don't clean their rooms every day with water, then they are living like hogs." Don't just leave things lying around; have lockers and use them. If we make a mess, we should clean it up on the spot, not leave it for someone else to tidy up. Keep a waste bin, use it, and empty it out daily. Keep a laundry basket, too, and place dirty cloth in it, not on top of it, near it, around it or half-in and half-out. Hang washed cloth to dry outside or in a separate room. Towels and *kaupīnas* especially should be out of sight. Keep walls, ceilings, fans, windows, and pictures clean too. Don't make a mess with the *tilaka.* Watch out for cobwebs and accumulated dust in corners and behind cupboards.

Basic rules of communal living should be observed. Items used communally (such as books) should not be taken away. After using, return them to the place where they are kept. And take permission before using anyone's personal possessions.

Bringing *prasāda* into the *brahmacārī-āśrama* invites ants, cockroaches, and mice; and stashing *prasāda* is against the pure devotional principles. The *Bhāgavatam* states, "A saintly mendicant should not even collect foodstuffs to eat later in the same day or the next day. If he disregards this injunction and like the honeybee collects more and more delicious foodstuffs, that which he has collected will indeed ruin him." (*SB* 11.8.12)

Keep the air fresh by burning incense and letting fresh air in as much as possible. Bad smells are horrible, and stale air is unhealthy. Be sure to keep the toilets and bathroom area always clean and disinfected. Unless peak cleanliness is maintained, disease can spread rapidly in communal situations.

There's no real place in the *brahmacārī-āśrama* for *karmī* books, magazines, or newspapers. Those devotees who really have to read such things in relation to their service can do so privately.

In a strict *āśrama,* lights go on and off at fixed times (e.g. 3:30 a.m. and 9:30 p.m.). Best is to awake to a Prabhupāda *bhajana* cassette. Late resters and early risers should go quietly, avoiding turning the lights on and only using a

flashlight if necessary, and even then being careful not to shine it in others' faces. So-called *brahmacārīs* who unnecessarily stay up late at night making so much noise that others cannot rest properly, and who then sleep in the morning program, are not proper *brahmacārīs* and are not fit to live in an *āśrama.*

On waking, don't lie in your bedding trying to enjoy the stupor of semi-consciousness. Rise immediately and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Reluctant risers should be firmly coaxed into action—don't let them rot in their misery. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "One who cannot rise early is not very serious about spiritual life." (SPL Ch. 33)

Most important of all to make the *brahmacārī* residence actually an *āśrama* is to keep the Kṛṣṇa conscious mood strong. That depends on the devotees themselves. Talk philosophy, chant the holy names, read Prabhupāda's books, recite *ślokas.* Don't waste time, and don't talk *prajalpa.* Otherwise the atmosphere will be intolerable.

Personal Relationships

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Relationships between Godbrothers must be very genuine and pleasing, otherwise the future of our institution is not very hopeful." (Letter, 01/10/69)

Communal living can be a strain, especially when there is pressure to conform to strict regulations, tight schedules, and ideal standards of Kṛṣṇa conscious behavior. Furthermore, life in modern society can be so confusing that many devotees who join the *brahmacārī-āśrama* will have disturbed and complex psychology. In the Western countries especially, many will have been through traumatic or perverted experiences, such as those resulting from failed love affairs, broken homes, homosexuality, molestation, intoxication, and violence. They come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness seeking peace of mind, love, security—a more natural, pure, and simple life in the shade of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet. People with many different backgrounds join this movement, so if we are to live peacefully in the society of devotees, we will have to learn to co-exist with all types of persons in all stages of development of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Due to

false ego, we all have the tendency to think that our approach to or vision of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is *the* correct one. But a symptom of a more advanced devotee is his willingness to appreciate the service done by others, without emphasizing their faults.

We have to work at creating a transcendental family atmosphere in our temples so that prospective devotees will automatically feel inclined to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Affection, intelligence, humility, readiness to listen, sympathy, consideration of others, kind words, and friendly dealings—in other words, mature Kṛṣṇa consciousness—are required. Thoughtfulness—little things like taking the trouble to fold another devotee's cloth after removing it from the line—can make all the difference.

It is a strange phenomenon in our movement that younger devotees are often more enthusiastic than devotees who have been initiated longer. However, it is best not to "get on the case" of a more senior devotee. The real test of steadiness in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is over long years, not a few short months. Generally, preaching to senior devotees should be done by devotees senior or equal to them (in terms of years in the movement, service record, strictness in following the Kṛṣṇa conscious process, etc.).

Be especially thoughtful when dealing with new or struggling devotees. Older men joining the *brahmacārī-āśrama* need special consideration also, for latecomers often find the austerities and high-pressure lifestyle hard to adjust to. Being more mature in years and experience of the world, it may be difficult for them to relate to the more youthful *brahmacārīs.*

After all, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a voluntary process. This movement can only run on love and trust, on the co-operative spirit. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The devotee's duty is to be always conscious in his dealings with others, especially with another devotee of the Lord." (*SB* 3.16.5) If we are not careful in dealing with devotees, personal relationships may get strained. Weaker devotees may get discouraged and go away, thus spoiling their great opportunity to perfect their lives in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Real friendship between devotees is deep and profound. It is most important that *brahmacārīs* develop great love, trust, and friendship with one another, based on the mood of each wanting to be the servant of the servant of each other. Devotees care for each other and help each other advance. If somehow or other we can establish even one or two deep friendships within this movement, that will be a great help to keep us fixed on the path throughout

our lives.
Sometimes, however, devotees may feel lonely, even if living with several nice devotees. They just can't seem to relate to anyone intimately. Sometimes devotees even get married mainly because they are seeking sympathy and close companionship. Inability to relate properly with devotees will certainly hamper our advancement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and to overcome such problems we may consult Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Nectar of Instruction,* Text 4, in which he explains the six exchanges of love shared by devotees. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a tried and tested process. It works. So if we experience loneliness, we simply have to make the endeavor to open up to other devotees and share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with them in the manner prescribed by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī. A devotee who is humble from his heart, who expects nothing and desires nothing but the menial service of the Vaiṣṇavas, will certainly have no problems relating to others.

The Brahmacārī Leader

If at all possible, a *brahmacārī* leader should live with the *brahmacārīs.* He should be a senior, exemplary, and mature devotee. Real *brahmacārīs* are like valuable jewels for our society. They work willingly and hard all day for Kṛṣṇa without any expectation of return, live austerely, are submissive and rarely complain. Often they are the ones who are doing the front line work of our mission, by preaching and distributing books. They are usually young men, maybe two- or three-year devotees, and appreciate older devotees' association for guidance and inspiration. But in our bigger centers, by necessity everything is departmentalized. Older devotees get married or get into specialized service such as management. Often inadvertently, the younger devotees are left without a leader. Although they have been around for some time, know what to do, and can give guidance to others, they still would appreciate and benefit from the association of an *āśrama* leader.
The *brahmacārī* leader can be a senior *brahmacārī,* a *sannyāsī,* or a renounced householder. He can live with or slightly separate from the *brahmacārīs.* (Also, if visiting or resident *sannyāsīs* have their quarters adjacent to the

brahmacārīs, it will be for their mutual benefit.) The *brahmacārī* leader will have his regular full-time service, but will still keep an eye on the *brahmacārīs.* He'll see that they are getting to the temple programs and keeping everything clean, he will encourage and advise them, and sometimes sit and read with them—he is there, he is available. We all need someone who we respect and trust, who we can reveal our minds in confidence to. Guiding and counseling dedicated devotees is a great service to Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana* movement.

Attitudes Towards Gṛhastha Men

Some stalwart *brahmacārīs* maintain a persistently harsh attitude towards *gṛhasthas,* or even towards *brahmacārīs* less rigid than themselves. Of course, *brahmacārīs* should always preach to each other about the glories of *brahmacārī* life and the dangers of householder life, for such discussions are healthy and help make the mind strong. However, to become unnecessarily critical or to develop a superiority complex are against the principles of pure devotion and are damaging to spiritual advancement. It is not necessarily true that a staunch *brahmacārī* is dearer to Kṛṣṇa than an apparently entangled householder. After all, we are like toys in the hands of *māyā;* if Kṛṣṇa withdraws His protection we will not be able to maintain our vows. Despite all the strictness we may maintain, despite all the austerities we may perform, if we become proud, that is our foolishness. Despite our external display of spiritual advancement, with such delusions of grandeur our actual progress will be very slow.

An interesting point is that the gurus in traditional *gurukulas* were often *gṛhasthas.* An example is Sāndīpani Muni, the guru of Kṛṣṇa. And many personalities far greater than us were householders. Among the twelve *mahājanas*, seven are or were householders. In the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement today also, many advanced, dedicated devotees are householders. So, without maintaining any stigmas, we should take good association wherever we find it. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura sings: "It does not matter whether a devotee is a *gṛhastha* or a *sannyāsī;* if he chants the name 'Gaurāṅga,' I want his association." Therefore *brahmacārīs* should be eager to

humbly serve devotee *gṛhasthas* and respect the service they render.
But make sure the association is good. Be cautious in mixing with devotees whose thoughts and conversations are involved only in family affairs and moneymaking, who are in the enjoying mood, or who do not strictly following the rules and regulations of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *Brahmacārīs* are not meant for socializing and hanging around *gṛhastha's* homes. And if a householder regularly watches TV and in other ways lives like a *karmī*, avoid his home—it is not a *gṛhastha-āśrama,* but a blind well. (Of course, for preaching, we have to go to *karmīs'* houses, but then we have to be all the more careful. Just to teach us, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Whenever I enter a rich man's house, I pray to Kṛṣṇa that I may not fall down.")
And even if householder devotees are good association, it is better that *brahmacārīs* not associate much with them in their homes or with their families. When doing so, a *brahmacārī* must maintain a strong internal resolve, otherwise he may become attracted to the affection and comforts of home life and think, "I could also be enjoying this." Once a *brahmacārī* starts thinking like that, the seed of his downfall is planted.
Brahmacārīs, unlike householder devotees, are able to directly absorb themselves in Kṛṣṇa consciousness without any extraneous distractions. Householders often look to the *sannyāsīs* and *brahmacārīs* for inspiration. *Sannyāsīs* have a special duty to guide and uplift *gṛhasthas*. Humble, blissful *brahmacārīs* will also be appreciated everywhere.

Dealings with Women Devotees

There is a great difference between ordinary materialistic women and those who have come to take shelter of Kṛṣṇa. Women in ISKCON are all devotees and therefore glorious. Some of them are clearly advanced from their previous lives. They should be regarded with all due respect—from a distance. If they are serious devotees, they will respect your strictness.
Due to lack of training or attachment to women's lib ideas, women devotees may sometimes act improperly with you. Better let it pass, and not make a scene out of it. Women are supposed to be trained in chastity, but modern

women aren't. We men also may still be influenced by the lusty exploitative mentality in our dealings with women. So we may also be at fault. If it becomes necessary, have a word with the temple authorities.

In these beginning days of ISKCON we have to be strict but also tolerant, understanding that most Westerners can't adjust their social behavior overnight to resemble that of traditional Indian Vaiṣṇavas. Śrīla Prabhupāda was sensitive about this point and therefore was successful in establishing Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the West.

Brahmacārīs often have a tendency to reject women, but Śrīla Prabhupāda never did that because he was above attraction and repulsion and simply wanted to engage everyone in Kṛṣṇa's service. When a devotee complained to Prabhupāda that the presence of women in our movement caused too many problems and suggested that we no longer accept women as full time devotees, Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, "They have come to take shelter of Kṛṣṇa. We cannot turn them away." (-Told by Dānavīra dāsa Gosvāmī)

"Regarding the disturbance made by woman devotees, they are also living beings. They also come to Kṛṣṇa. So consciously I cannot deny them. If our male members, the *brahmacārīs* and the *sannyāsīs,* become steady in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is no problem. It is the duty of the male members to be very steady and cautious. This can be done by regular chanting like Haridāsa Ṭhākura did. Whenever there is a young woman, we should remember Haridāsa Ṭhākura and beg his mercy to protect us, and we should think that these beautiful *gopīs* are meant for the enjoyment of Kṛṣṇa. It is a dilemma for our society that we cannot deny these girls, and at the same time they are a great dangerous allurement to the young boys." (Letter, 29/09/75)

On being informed that some *brahmacārīs* felt disturbed by the presence of women in the temple, Śrīla Prabhupāda sarcastically suggested that the *brahmacārīs* go to the forest. (Letter, 03/12/72) Previously, *brahmacārīs* used to live in the forest, far away from the agitation of the cities. But that is not possible in the modern age. Indeed, as a consequence of preaching, at least as many women as men will be attracted to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and we cannot deny their existence, or their right to serve Kṛṣṇa. Rather, anyone who comes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness must be encouraged. However, as long as one is not completely pure, if a male devotee begins with the best intentions to encourage a woman to take to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the tendency is to become attracted on the emotional and physical levels. Therefore, even though

brahmacārīs may preach to anyone, it is better that women preach to women. In 1967, at the 2nd Avenue temple in New York City, Śrīla Prabhupāda announced in one class, "Don't see these girls as objects of sense gratification. See them as associates of Kṛṣṇa." (Told by Jadurāṇī-devī dāsī) And in the mid-1970's in America, a party of *sannyāsīs* and *brahmacārīs* became overly righteous about the attachments of *gṛhasthas* and women. Tension developed and reached exploding point at the Māyāpura Festival of 1976. In the course of setting everything straight (the way he always did—by preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness) Śrīla Prabhupāda said that male devotees should address the women as "My dear mother" and the women should see the men as "My dear son." (Told by Jadurāṇī-devī dāsī)

In a conversation in Seattle in 1968, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Now, another thing: Girls should not be taken as inferior. Sometimes, of course, in scripture we say that woman is the cause of bondage. So, that should not be aggravated that women are inferior. The girls who come, we should treat them nicely. After all, anyone who is coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, man or woman, is very fortunate. The idea of addressing each other as *Prabhu* means, 'You are my master.' *Prabhu* means 'master.' So everyone shall treat others as 'my master.' This is Vaiṣṇava understanding. In spiritual life there is nothing like this sexism. The more we forget sex life means we are advancing in spiritual life. So this should be the attitude: women, godsisters, should be nicely treated."

There is an amusing story from Brazil, where in one temple all the *brahmacārīs* became so "fired-up" that they wanted to send all the women away. When the GBC, H.H. Hṛdayānanda Gosvāmī, found out, he joked, "Don't be ridiculous. Then the *brahmacārīs* wouldn't have anyone to perform for."

There are certain points in Prabhupāda's books concerning women which unless one is a very self-controlled devotee and expert preacher, one should be cautious about repeating in public and in classes, especially if women devotees or guests are present (e.g., quotes stating women to be less intelligent than men, or nine times as lusty, etc.). After all, *māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya,* and *kalau śūdra-sambhavaḥ*. Everyone in this age is low born. Men or women, we are all running on Lord Caitanya's and Śrīla Prabhupāda's mercy. We don't want to discourage women who are already devotees, nor those who are potential devotees. Nor do we want to make the *brahmacārīs* artificially proud. Sensitive topics need to be handled by competent devotees.

The Vedic social philosophy states that women are to be protected by men, but that duty is for the *gṛhasthas*, not for *brahmacārīs* or *sannyāsīs*. For a *brahmacārī*, young women mean trouble. However sincere young women devotees may be, when in contact with *brahmacārīs* a kind of energy is produced that is not conducive for devotional advancement. Those who have regular contact with young women devotees, even innocently or for the sake of service, are almost certain to get worn down. They may not even notice the effect of such association, but nevertheless it is like radioactivity: slow, subtle, and irreversible.

A *brahmacārī* should be very cautious if a woman is being "too nice" to him (e.g. keeps giving him *mahā-prasāda*). Service by a woman is a trap for a man. (*SB* 3.31.40) It is women's nature to seek shelter and protection from a man, because it is generally both spiritually and materially beneficial for them to be married. But *brahmacārīs* should know that although men generally improve materially if married, that so-called improvement simply means entanglement in sense gratification; therefore for a man's spiritual progress it is intrinsically better to live without a woman. Acting on the platform of this knowledge, a *brahmacārī* who wants to stay *brahmacārī* has to be free from material compassion for women looking for husbands.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The managers of our society should see that all the *brahmacārīs* stay *brahmacārī*, and all the women get married." Devotees: "How is that possible, Śrīla Prabhupāda?" Śrīla Prabhupāda: "That is your management." (Told by Girirāja Swami)

Śrīla Prabhupāda noted, "These girls generally come to our society to find out a suitable husband." (Letter, 06/10/68) Naturally, women devotees want to marry the best men devotees. They tend to be more attracted to *brahmacārīs* who are steady, committed, mature, and responsible. Almost perversely, *brahmacārīs* who are serious to stay *brahmacārīs* usually become targets of anxious *brahmacāriṇīs*. For a women to "hunt down" a man who wants to remain committed to *brahmacārī* life could be considered an act of violence against his progressive spiritual development. On the other hand, it can be considered a test that even great sages have to undergo.

If a *brahmacārī* who wants to stay a *brahmacārī* finds that a young woman is becoming friendly towards him, alarm bells should go off in his head and he should extricate himself from that situation. If that is not possible, the next best response is not to respond. To remain polite but cold in the face of

advances, and to consistently show disinterest, soon convinces women to direct their conjugal aspirations elsewhere. There is no room for sentiment in such dealings. If the *brahmacārī* allows his heart to flutter and reciprocates with even a little interest, the huntress, being encouraged, will not stop until the quarry's heart is fully pierced with Cupid's arrows.

If, however, a woman remains persistent in her desire for an unwilling *brahmacārī,* the latter may frankly say to her, "Mātājī, I already gave many lifetimes to many women like yourself. Please give me your blessings that I can give this life fully to Kṛṣṇa, without unnecessary disturbances or entanglements." If the *brahmacārī* is serious about his commitment, only a shameless woman would continue to pursue him further.

However, in our temples it is often a practical necessity that men and women engage in devotional service side by side. We can't avoid such situations, although temple authorities should arrange that male and female devotees are kept apart as much as possible. *Brahmacārīs* should maintain Vaiṣṇava respect towards devotee women, without becoming overly familiar or loose, or developing friendships with them. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "*Sannyāsīs* should have 'Keep in a cool place' stamped on their foreheads, just like on the butter package." (Told by Śrutakīrti dāsa)

Dealings with Nondevotee Women

Dealing with nondevotee women in the developed countries is an even bigger problem because they have no idea how to behave with *brahmacārīs* at all. Nor is it possible to explain to them. It is very, very dangerous and better to be avoided totally (which is impossible).

There is no stricture that *brahmacārīs* cannot preach to women, but after a woman's interest in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is aroused, it is better that further preaching to her be done by women devotees. Otherwise, if a *brahmacārī* repeatedly preaches to the same woman, the fire and butter principle is sure to act.

Saṅkīrtana devotees often have extensive contact with nondevotee women, so they have no other recourse but to constantly pray for the special mercy of

Lord Caitanya to protect them. They should be alert, keeping their minds tightly under control, lest like Ajāmila they be "victimized by the dangerous lustful glance of a prostitute." (*SB* 6.1.65) *Saṅkīrtana* devotees should avoid visiting degraded places such as porno shops and sleazy bars. There are plenty of other places to distribute books. Although we may not be immediately affected, everything we see remains as an impression within the mind. Later on, maybe years later, those experiences may resurface in the consciousness and cause agitation. As Prabhupāda said after preaching at a rock concert, "This is no place for a *brahmacārī*." (SPL Ch. 22)

Saṅkīrtana brahmacārīs who feel agitation from contact with women on *saṅkīrtana* are advised to concentrate on preaching and distributing books to men. If a devotee finds that he is not maintaining his spiritual strength and feels that his position in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is being threatened because of constant contact with nondevotee women, he should discuss with his temple authorities and if necessary adjust his service.

Dealings with Children

Apart from those *brahmacārīs* connected with the *gurukula*, most *brahmacārīs* generally won't have a lot of contact with children. *Brahmacārīs* have no business frivolously playing with children or fondling them (fondling children or animals can mean attempting to enjoy their bodies). Any dealings with children should be on the basis of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Children look up to whatever example adults set, so especially in the presence of children *brahmacārīs* should be responsible enough to act in an ideal Kṛṣṇa conscious way. Not that joking or light-heartedness are by any means forbidden for a *brahmacārī*, but the tendency of many adults to become childish in the presence of children is beneficial neither for the adults or the children.

If you feel there's a need to correct or chastise a child, better refer to his parents or teachers. After all, children are very sensitive.

Dealings with Family and Friends

A Kṛṣṇa conscious person is not interested in associating with nondevotees. But he cannot be totally insensitive to those "near and dear ones" from his pre-devotional days. Usually, parents and others just can't understand why "their boy" "dropped everything" to shave his head and chant, dance, and be happy. Sometimes family members are favorable, sometimes neutral, and sometimes inimical towards Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But in almost all cases, if dealt with considerately, they will gradually adjust to their son's being a "Hare Kṛṣṇa." Sometimes they even become devotees themselves.

So it's best to be patient and try not to antagonize them. If they make a fuss, try to point out some positive aspects of your involvement in Kṛṣṇa consciousness which they may appreciate: that you're happy, living a clean life, and so on. And make sure to give them *prasāda,* as much and as often as possible.

If they remain persistently antagonistic, then there will be no other alternative than to politely but firmly cut off contact with them until they are ready to change their outlook. Ultimately it's your life, to do with as you see fit.

Some advice from Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Regarding your manner of behavior with your parents who are not in Kṛṣṇa consciousness; I may inform you that you should treat four different classes of men in four different ways. A devotee should love God and God's devotees. A devotee should make friendship with devotees. A devotee should try to enlighten innocent persons, and a devotee should reject opposite elements. As father and mother they should be offered proper respect according to social custom, but you cannot accept their non-Godly instructions. Best thing is, to avoid misunderstanding, to remain silent without any affirmation or negation of their instructions. We should try to keep our friendship with everyone in the world, but we cannot sacrifice the principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness on being employed by some relative of this world. Don't let them know that you do not approve of your parents' instructions, but at the same time you should be very careful in dealing with them. If you object to their instruction and let them know it, then they will

feel sorry, sad." (Letter, 29/03/68)

Dealings with Nondevotees in General

The *Bhāgavatam* enjoins that a middle-level devotee recognize two classes of nondevotee and behave with them accordingly. (*SB* 11.2.46) He should show mercy to the innocent (by giving them Kṛṣṇa consciousness) and avoid the inimical.

Our movement is a pioneering one and, especially in the West, sometimes meets with hostility. Of course, we often meet with tolerance also, but rarely with understanding. The culture of respecting *sādhus* just isn't there.

Newer devotees who have yet to attain steadiness in devotional service often experience Kṛṣṇa conscious bliss during the morning program, but once outside the temple compound find it difficult not to lose their consciousness to *māyā*.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising if they develop defensive or negative attitudes towards nondevotees, whose habits, opinions and comments constantly undermine the undeveloped faith of the beginning devotee and threaten his very standing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.* Of course, not all nondevotees are out-and-out demons or rogues and cannot be so generalized. Nor can we assume that we are really devotees, beyond that we are trying to be so. Still, there is a great difference between *karmīs* (a term Śrīla Prabhupāda used to generally describe materialists in the modern age) and devotees. And for all devotees, aspiring or advanced, association with nondevotees is unpalatable and can be detrimental (unless we are engaging them in Kṛṣṇa's service, which is blissful).

The Nectar of Devotion directs devotees not to be neglectful in ordinary dealings, yet also to rigidly give up the company of nondevotees. One should deal with the material world only as much as necessary, or in other words, only for essential matters. While doing so, we should try to conduct ourselves in such a way that nondevotees may gradually become favorable to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or at least not inimical towards it.

Giving Up Nondevotional Attachments

Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the culture of the spiritual world, a continuous festival of multifarious transcendental activities. But we are so unfortunate that we are still attracted to the worldly tidings of sense pleasure.

A real devotee has no business reading nondevotional literature (unless it's directly related to service, e.g. the gardener consulting a gardening book), watching TV, going to the cinema, eating food cooked by nondevotees, following sports, politics, or fashions, learning martial arts, or listening to nondevotional music.* The fickle mind dreams up justifications for engaging in these useless activities, inventing myths of how they can be related to devotional service. But ninety-five percent of the time we indulge in them for our own sense gratification, not for the sake of *bhakti*.

Lord Caitanya warned that eating the food of materialistic people will pollute the mind; thus we will not be able to remember Kṛṣṇa and our life will be spoiled. Grains cooked by nondevotees are especially contaminating. If we can take nice *prasāda*, what is the need for anything else? Even when out traveling, we should take care not to sacrifice our standards for the sake of convenience. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Food prepared by an unclean, sinful man or woman is extremely infectious."

We also have to be careful what we read. Newspapers and magazines may provide information that is relevant for us, but they also have much information that we do not need. They also usually have photos of attractive women. Many nondevotional literatures contain subtle sexual connotations, which pollute the mind and mislead the intelligence. Sex literatures, even of the so-called scientific type, are to be rigidly avoided. Just as the consciousness of the cook enters into food, so do the thoughts of the writer enter the writing. We have to be vigilant not to become subtly contaminated.

Wearing *karmī* clothes when there is no clear need to is an expression of mundane attachment. Once Śrīla Prabhupāda admonished some devotees for having long hair and not shaving their heads regularly. Although they gave all kinds of "reasons" for doing so, such as "being good for preaching," Śrīla Prabhupāda detected the real reason: "hippie seeds." (Conversation, 29/05/77)

The revealing phrase, "hippie seeds," can be applied to anything that is not clearly, authorizedly, and directly meant for the service of Kṛṣṇa.
We may not even realize how it is happening, but these materialistic tendencies subtly poison the consciousness. We are trying to get free from the modes of material nature, but these *karmī* attachments will drag us down. We may say: "Those strong attachments are there, what can I do?" What we can do is work on getting rid of them, instead of surrendering to them and again cultivating them.
If my readers find these restrictions too fanatical or unrealistic I must inform that in pre-1977 ISKCON (when Śrīla Prabhupāda was personally leading and directing us) these were all taboo, practically unheard of amongst devotees. Śrīla Prabhupāda trained us so nicely. It's only since his departure that we've unlearned so many of the things that he painstakingly taught us.
Kṛṣṇa consciousness means new life, a fresh perspective of reality. If we want to be free from the shackles of *māyā,* we can't hold on to the ball-and-chain of mundane involvement. If we really want Kṛṣṇa, we're going to have to snap off these attachments. To maintain interest in even one sphere of illusion will constitute an obstruction, blocking our progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Remember, the real idea of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is to surrender mind, body, and words to Kṛṣṇa. To go beyond a superficial level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness means to get serious.
These mundane attachments have to be replaced with Kṛṣṇa conscious attachments. That is possible by dovetailing our desires in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, not diverting them back to be dovetailed again with *māyā*. How to do it? Simple. We can read Kṛṣṇa conscious literature (Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us so much), sing Kṛṣṇa conscious *bhajanas* (there are so many), perform Kṛṣṇa conscious dramas (there's plenty of scope), discuss Kṛṣṇa conscious philosophy (there's unlimited depth), and cook for Kṛṣṇa (there are thousands of preparations). The Kṛṣṇa connection will purify us. But nondevotional activities are saturated with the modes of passion and ignorance and simply contaminate and disturb the mind. A serious devotee must give them up.

Yukta-vairāgya

"Renunciation is the basic principle sustaining the lives of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's devotees. Seeing this renunciation, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is extremely satisfied." (*Cc. Antya* 6.220)
Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has analyzed the real meaning of renunciation: "When one is not attached to anything, but at the same time accepts everything in relation to Kṛṣṇa, one is rightly situated above possessiveness. On the other hand, one who rejects everything without knowledge of its relationship to Kṛṣṇa is not as complete in his renunciation." (*-Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.2.255-6)
This means that if a devotee has the opportunity to utilize anything in the service of Kṛṣṇa, he should do so, even if such an object is usually used for materialistic purposes. This is called *yukta-vairāgya.* Devotees use all kinds of machines, collect and spend millions of dollars, engage women, form international organizations—all for the service of Kṛṣṇa.
Still, we have to be careful. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to quote the Bengali saying, "Fish, but don't touch the water." There is danger at every step in the material world. If we forget the connection with Kṛṣṇa, we will become lured into material consciousness again. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "In the material world, all distresses are due to extravagance." Money and power can be intoxicating, management can give rise to the illusion that "I am the doer, I am the controller," and machines can fascinate. We may consider ourselves strong, but Śrīla Prabhupāda knew all our weaknesses.
Therefore he stressed that we must regularly hear and chant about Kṛṣṇa, so as to keep the right perspective. For a devotee to progress, he must hear and chant sufficiently. Even if he is absorbed in service, that is not enough. Hearing and chanting must be there, with quality and in sufficient quantity. By working for work's sake, taking pleasure from manipulating money and machines, one's consciousness may end up like a materialist's. So many devotees in the past have become diverted from the goal of life or lured into unnecessarily opulent living in the name of *yukta-vairāgya*. The distinction between the moods of renunciation and enjoyment may sometimes be very subtle, but the attitude makes the difference between a *karmī* and a devotee—one wants to enjoy, the other wants to serve. Without *vairāgya,* there is no possibility of *yukta-vairāgya*.
The ability to utilize material opulence in Kṛṣṇa's service without becoming affected is possible for advanced devotees. So *brahmacārīs* especially should

practice *yukta-vairāgya* with great restraint, under the guidance of an expert spiritual master, tending always towards austerity and self-denial rather than comfortable living, within the parameters approved by Śrīla Prabhupāda:
Books are the Basis
Preaching is the Essence
Utility is the Principle
Purity is the Force.

India

If you can take it, India is a great place for *brahmacārīs*. In India, you don't have to try to be austere—life is automatically austere. If you have an inclination for *tapasya*, you will find the right atmosphere in Bhārata-varṣa. Despite modern India's pathetic attempts to imitate the West, and despite the hellish sex/violence cinema and music syndrome, India is still a lot less sexually agitating than the West. Of course, if someone wants to fall down he can do so anywhere; but the opportunities are less blatant than in the West. There is still some civilization and culture left.
And that is one of the reasons why Śrīla Prabhupāda wanted devotees to come to India. Western devotees are very impressive to Indians. Indians tend to respect Western devotees, especially if they are competent preachers and know how to conduct themselves as *sādhus*. There is great opportunity for Western devotees in India to preach, and to simultaneously pick up some Vedic culture.
They can get a broader perspective of Kṛṣṇa consciousness by experiencing how it is still accepted and practiced by millions. They can derive the benefit of visiting and serving the holy *dhāmas*, especially Māyāpura and Vṛndāvana, learn to conduct themselves as *sādhus,* and pick up devotional skills such as cooking and preaching to persons who are knowledgeable in *śāstra*. They will have to develop tolerance, patience, and self-reliance to cope with the difficulties of life in India. Devotees can learn how to behave with superiors and juniors and how to conduct themselves with gravity. Future *gṛhasthas* can see how family life should be, and how to bring up children.

The real benefit that India has to offer goes to those devotees who come to spend an extended period for service, rather than for just a brief visit. It is not essential or practical that every devotee serve in India; but it would be a great help for *brahmacārīs* to spend a year or two in Bhārata-varṣa before plunging into the *gṛhastha-āśrama*. Especially if one travels and preaches in India, and is a little receptive and intelligent, he can have a lot of Kṛṣṇa conscious fun and adventure, and gain a broad vision of Kṛṣṇa consciousness which will stay with him throughout his life.
All arrangements should be made in consultation with the relevant authorities.

Overcoming Sexual Desire

As Garuḍa is the enemy of snakes, as impersonalism is the enemy of devotion, so lust is the enemy of the conditioned soul. It is the first of three gateways to hell. (*Bg.* 16.21) Lust is so powerful that it may seem impossible to overcome. The *brahmacārī* vows to fight sex desire, and may sometimes think he is winning the battle, only to find himself again plunged into the ocean of material desire.
This is due to previous *saṁskāras* (impressions in the *citta*, subconsciousness). Every activity, thought, and sensual experience of a conditioned soul produces a *saṁskāra*. Each saṁskāra becomes added to a stockpile of mental impressions that is not vanquished even at death. Sexual acts, or even thoughts of sex, produce particularly strong *saṁskāras*. These *saṁskāras* influence the disposition (*vṛtti*) of a person and give rise to innumerable *vāsanās* (material desires).
These *saṁskāras*, impressions from previous births, are embedded deep in the subconsciousness, and thus even a devotee seriously practicing *brahmacarya* may still have strong sexual desires. Even an apparently pure *brahmacārī* may have latent sexual desires that can emerge and destroy him at any time, as was the case with Ajāmila. (*SB* 6.1.56-63) How can we overcome this eternal enemy, this destroyer of knowledge and self-realization? (*Bg.* 3.39.41) What can we do if we are sexually agitated?

There is a process to overcome sex attraction, and that process is the system of devotional service. The practice of *brahmacarya* is essential in, but subsidiary to, the ultimate purifying process of devotional service. Only by devotional service can material desires be entirely overcome. As with Āyurvedic treatment, the cure for the disease may not be immediate, but it will be complete. The malady is deeply rooted and complex. We have been dominated by sexual desires for millions of lifetimes, and it is not easy to shake them off. To overcome it we will have to take a serious, mature decision to continue with devotional service throughout our lives. That is the only remedy.

First of all, we have to understand that *everyone* is sexually agitated. Apart from completely pure devotees, who are very rare in this world, everyone from Brahmā down to the ants and bugs is disturbed by sexual attraction. Even *sannyāsīs* and other advanced devotees may be subject to such attacks from *māyā* at any time. But because they have practiced controlling these gross desires, they are able to remain steady in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

We should not become discouraged, thinking that sex desire is impossible to overcome. We must have the conviction that it *is* possible. Prahlāda Mahārāja compares sex agitation to an itch. (*SB* 7.9.45) It irritates, and we want to scratch it. But if we scratch it, it gets worse. Better to tolerate without scratching; then in course of time, the irritation will gradually go away. We have to be realistic that in almost all cases it will take considerable time, patience, and faith to conquer this most basic and overwhelming of all material desires. We have to go on in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, praying to Kṛṣṇa for help in controlling the rascal mind.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* Kṛṣṇa admits that it is very difficult to curb the restless mind, but assures that it is possible by constant practice and by detachment. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "By training, one can forget sex life." (Conversation, 30/08/73) Traditionally, *brahmacārīs* were trained rigidly from birth. That was when the whole atmosphere was much more favorable for spiritual advancement. But we have been brought up in a highly disturbed society, with no training in sense control—rather, the opposite. How is it possible, then, for us to control the mind and senses and be rigid *brahmacārīs*?

No doubt, it is very difficult to control the mind and senses, especially in the modern age. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Unless we at least try, we are not even civilized human beings, what to speak of being spiritual aspirants. And certainly Kṛṣna will help us, if we really want to be helped. Kṛṣna has

come as Lord Caitanya to help us in our most fallen position with the best of all advice: chant Hare Kṛṣṇa. Everything is possible for those who chant the holy names with sincerity and patience. Chanting cleans the heart. *Ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam*. Lord Caitanya said, *ihā haite sarva-siddhi haibe sabāra*: "By chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, everyone will get all perfection." (*Caitanya-bhāgavata Madhya* 23.78)

As explained by Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Everyone wants to fulfill lusty desires. So unless one is in the modes of goodness or transcendental, everyone will like. That is the material world, *rajas-tamaḥ*. Just like I am a hungry man. There is foodstuff. I want to eat it. So if I take by force, that is illegal, and if I pay for it, then it is legal. But I am the hungry man, I want it. This is going on. Everyone is lusty. Therefore they say 'legalized prostitution.' They want it.

"So marriage is something legalized, that's all. The passion and the desire is the same, either married or not married. So this Vedic law says, 'Better married. Then you will be controlled.' So he will not be so lusty as without married life. So the *gṛhastha* life is a concession—the same lusty desire under rules and regulation. Without married life he will commit rape in so many ways, so better let him be satisfied with one, both the man and woman, and make progress in spiritual life.

"Everyone in this material world has come with these lusty desires and greediness. Even demigods like Lord Śiva, Lord Brahmā. Lord Brahmā became lusty after his daughter. And Lord Śiva became mad after Mohinī-mūrti. So what to speak of us insignificant creatures? Lusty desire is there. That is the material world.

"Unless one is fully Kṛṣṇa conscious, this lusty desire cannot be checked. It is not possible. That is *tapasya*, that voluntarily we accept some inconvenience. *Tapasā brahmacaryena*. *Tapasya* means first *brahmacarya*, how to avoid sex desire. That is first step. Where is their *tapasya*? It is very difficult to do this *tapasya*. Therefore Caitanya Mahāprabhu has given *harer nāma*. If you chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra regularly, you'll be cured. Otherwise, regular *tapasya* is almost impossible nowadays." (Conversation, 11/05/75)

We have to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, not just mechanically, but really calling out to Kṛṣṇa for help to follow all the eight features of *brahmacarya* properly. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: "If we stick to the principle of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* offenselessly, then, by the grace of Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura, we may be saved from the allurement of women. However, if we are not very strict

in chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, we may at any time fall victim to women." (*SB* 5.6.3)

The *Vedānta-sūtra* (4.4.22) refers to *anāvṛttiḥ śabdāt*, liberation by sound. Chanting loudly and clearly greatly helps in overcoming lust. In traditional *gurukulas*, *brahmacārīs* chant Vedic mantras for hours daily. Along with chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, devotees may take up the *sādhana* of loudly chanting verses from *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, or other scriptures or *stotras*.

Chanting should be accompanied by regular hearing about the realities of material life. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* narrates the activities of great personalities like Yayāti, Purūravā, and Saubhari who found out after years wasted in attempting to enjoy sex that there is no enjoyment in it at all. Their stories are recorded so that intelligent people can come to the same conclusion simply by hearing about them.

Hearing about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the *gopīs* is specifically recommended to vanquish lusty desires in the heart. (*SB* 10.33.39) However, "If you become more lusty by seeing or hearing the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhārāṇī, that means you are not fit. Stop it. Don't be foolish." (Lecture, 30/03/75)

Hearing accompanied by contemplation leads to realization. The real thing is to become totally disgusted with the thought of sex. But until we reach that stage, we have to carefully control the mind and body by intelligent understanding that sex is not in our interest. Therefore the intelligence should be applied to consider the following points:

The temporary nature of the beauty of young women; the young girls of today are the old women of tomorrow.

The illusory nature of that beauty. Try imagining how beautiful a woman's body would be minus it's skin!

Sex does not bring happiness. The nondevotees are having sex, but they are miserable. The devotees are happy, and the more they advance and give up material attachments, the happier they become.

On the contrary, engagement in sex, licit or illicit, inevitably leads to suffering. It is unavoidable. (See "Sex—The Cause of Unlimited Suffering,")

Sex desire, although much appreciated by people in general, causes pain to the heart.

Sex is disappointing, firstly because the anticipated delight is never fulfilled in the actual act. In other words, it is not as enjoyable as *māyā* would have us

believe.
Sex is frustrating, because desires for it are unlimited, but physical ability to engage in it is limited to a few minutes at a time.
Devotees have higher knowledge and experience of a higher taste. Just as a rich man can never savor the coarse rice relished by the poor man, so even a fallen devotee cannot enjoy the illusory pleasure of sex, even though he tries.
We made a commitment at the time of initiation. For one who knows the difference between right and wrong and has taken a vow not to sin, to willingly engage in illicit sex will bring serious reactions.
The most important reason for refraining from illicit sex, or from even thinking of sex, is that it is not pleasing to guru and Kṛṣṇa.
According to Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī, by meditation on the Supreme Lord one can overcome lust and other mental disturbances. (*SB* 11.28.40) More specifically, the *Bhāgavatam* states that sex desire can be overcome by meditation on Kṛṣṇa's eyebrows. (*SB* 3.28.32) This can be very effective. We can meditate on the Deity we are serving, or on pictures of Kṛṣṇa—Kṛṣṇa will help us. Śrīla Prabhupāda also recommended Deity worship for those very troubled by lusty desires. We may think ourselves too impure to go anywhere near the Deities, but this process is prescribed because if one is at all principled, when he comes in the presence of the Deities he must force his mind to stop thinking of sex. And gradually, by performing this intimate service, a conscientious devotee will become so attracted to Kṛṣṇa that all lower desires will become insignificant.
Don't play games with the mind. It is useless to meditate on sense gratification and also hope to give it up. (*SB* 11.22.56) Better than meditating on sex is meditating on the consequences of it. Any sane person should consider the suffering that accrues from sexual activity and resolve not to indulge in it.
Habitually looking at women and thinking of them plunges a person into the ocean of lusty desires and drives him mad. There is no question of spiritual advancement for such a person. Conversely, one who gives up the bad habit of looking at women with lusty intentions will automatically become more peaceful in mind. What to speak of not looking at women, a *brahmacārī* should not even look at animals engaged in sexual affairs, remembering that the great yogi Saubhari Muni fell down by seeing the copulation of fish. (*SB* 9.6.39-53)
Somehow or other the mind must be wrenched away from sense gratification and fixed on Kṛṣṇa. Tell yourself: "If you want to have sex, you can. It's not

difficult to arrange. Everyone is having sex. But if you want Kṛṣṇa, that is something else. So either go ahead, get married, do it, or forget it altogether."
As stated in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.15.22), *asaṅkalpāj jayet kāmam:* By making plans with determination, one should give up lusty desires for sense gratification. *Asaṅkalpāt* can be translated as, "By not making plans for sex; by not thinking about it; by not visualizing it; by not day-dreaming about it." In his commentary, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura suggests *bhogārhatā-buddhi varjanāt* as a synonym for *asaṅkalpāt*. This basically means, "by giving up the enjoying mentality." Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura comments: "*Asaṅkalpāt* means that even if lust arises from remembrance or seeing of a woman, a person is determined not to think, 'This woman is to be enjoyed by me;' thus he conquers lust."
One technique to control the mind is to ignore it. "A person who is not disturbed by the incessant flow of desires—that enter like rivers into the ocean, which is ever being filled but is always still—can alone achieve peace, and not the man who strives to satisfy such desires." (*Bg.* 2.70) "By tolerance alone can one conquer desires and avarice." (*SB* 1.9.27)
So many nonsense thoughts enter our minds. If instead of picking up on them we simply ignore them, they will naturally and quickly die, to be replaced by other thoughts. Therefore we have to train our minds to think of Kṛṣṇa. *Sa vai manaḥ kṛṣṇa-pādāravindayoḥ:* Mahārāja Ambarīṣa engaged in various activities of devotional service but first of all he fixed his mind on Kṛṣṇa. (*SB* 9.4.18) Philosophical discussion between devotees, attempting to understand the philosophy of Kṛṣṇa consciousness "from different angles of vision" (as Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged us to do), gives the mind meaningful subject matter to meditate on and makes it strong. "One should not be lazy in the matter of understanding the philosophical conclusions of devotional service, for such discussions strengthen the mind. Thus one's mind becomes attached to Śrī Kṛṣṇa." (*Cc. Ādi* 2.117)
Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has suggested that devotees harassed by morbid desires for sexual enjoyment meditate on Kṛṣṇa's pastime of killing Śaṅkhacūḍa. Śaṅkhacūḍa wanted to enjoy with the *gopīs*. Similarly, we should understand that our desire to enjoy sex is demoniac, for all living entities are *prakṛti* and are meant to be enjoyed by Kṛṣṇa. So we should loudly cry out to Kṛṣṇa that, just as He killed the demon Śaṅkhacūḍa, may He please kill our demoniac desires.

There are many suitable prayers to help us overcome sexual agitation. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* there is a prayer, "May Sanat-kumāra protect me from lusty desires." (*SB* 6.8.17) In the purport Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Lusty desires are very strong in everyone, and they are the greatest impediment to the discharge of devotional service. Therefore those who are very much influenced by lusty desires are advised to take shelter of Sanat-kumāra, the great *brahmacārī* devotee." Another nice prayer is found in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Madhya* 22.16):

kāmādīnāṁ kati na katidhā pālitā durnideśās
teṣāṁ jātā mayi na karuṇā na trapā nopaśāntiḥ
utsṛjyaitān atha yadu-pate sāmprataṁ labdha-buddhis
tvām āyātaḥ śaraṇam abhayaṁ māṁ niyuṅkṣvātma-dāsye

"O my Lord, there is no limit to the unwanted orders of lusty desires. Although I have rendered them so much service, they have not shown any mercy to me. I have not been ashamed to serve them, nor have I even desired to give them up. O my Lord, head of the Yadu dynasty, recently, however, my intelligence has been awakened, and now I am giving them up. Due to transcendental intelligence, I now refuse to obey the unwanted orders of these desires, and I now come to you to surrender myself at your fearless lotus feet. Kindly engage me in your personal service and save me." Then there is the classic prayer of Caitanya Mahāprabhu:

ayi nanda-tanuja kiṅkaraṁ
patitaṁ māṁ viṣame bhavāmbudhau
kṛpayā tava pāda-paṅkaja-
sthita-dhūlī-sadṛśaṁ vicintaya

"O son of Nanda Mahārāja (Kṛṣṇa), I am your eternal servitor, yet somehow or other I have fallen into the ocean of birth and death. Please pick me up from this ocean of death and place me as one of the atoms at your lotus feet." (*Śīkṣāṣṭakam* 5)

We have no other shelter but Kṛṣṇa, as Śrīla Prabhupāda explained: "Our most difficult position is sex. Kṛṣṇa, *māyā,* has given such a propensity—sex—that it will create disturbance. Even though you are rigid and vowed and you are doing nicely, sometimes, especially at night, you are disturbed. Therefore, *suratau*—Kṛṣṇa is the most expert in this conjugal love, therefore we have to

admit, surrender to Kṛṣṇa, *suratau paṅgor*. We are very much feeble and very slow and so far as our sex impulse is concerned, here it is especially mentioned Madana-mohana. Sex impulse is called Cupid, Madana. If we become staunch devotees of Kṛṣṇa these material sex impulses will vanish. Because even Cupid becomes attracted by Kṛṣṇa. We are attracted by Cupid, but Cupid is attracted by Kṛṣṇa, therefore Kṛṣṇa is Madana-mohana. That is the only remedy. *Yadāvadhi mama cetaḥ kṛṣṇa-padāravinde.* If you stick to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa—'Kṛṣṇa please save me'—then this material thing, sex agitation, will not disturb you. This is the only way. Therefore it is said, 'Madana-mohana.' Our spiritual life is hampered very strongly by this sex impulse, but it is material so we try to tolerate.

"Just tolerate a little, and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, pray to Kṛṣṇa, 'Please save me from these disturbances.' And we should materially also control. Control means *atyāhāraḥ prayāsaś ca prajalpo niyamāgrahaḥ. Atyāhāraḥ* means too much eating, that is also agitating. So everything can be controlled by Kṛṣṇa's grace. He is Madana-mohana; therefore our first business is to surrender to Madana-mohana and establish our relationship with Him. 'My dear Lord Kṛṣṇa, I have so long forgotten You.' That song is sung by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *mānasa deho geho jo kichu mora, arpiluṅ tuwā pade nanda-kiśora.* This is full surrender. Then Kṛṣṇa answers, *ahaṁ tvāṁ sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ*. He will protect us, so *tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata.* There are many disturbances. So Kṛṣṇa says, 'Tolerate, and do your business faithfully.' Chant Hare Kṛṣṇa, follow the rules and regulations, and remain fully surrendered at the lotus feet of Madana-mohana, there will be no more disturbance." (Lecture, 08/04/75) (Śrīla Prabhupāda also described that unless one is captivated by the beauty of Madana-mohana, then he will be *Madana-dahana,* troubled by the arrows of Cupid. See *Cc. Ādi* 1.19 Purport to understand more about approaching Madana-mohana.)

Perfection is not achieved in a day. We may stumble while climbing a mountain, but we have to re-gather our strength and determination and resume the climb, until we become so adept that we don't slip anymore. Ultimately, we have to develop a superlatively higher taste in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. We have to actually get to the stage where we're always experiencing great bliss.

To get to the top of the mountain and onto the plateau takes much endeavor. What is required is full surrender of mind, body, and words, twenty-four hours

a day, forever, and nothing less. It definitely *is* possible, for that is the promise of guru and Kṛṣṇa. But we have to become qualified to receive their mercy. Lord Kṛṣṇa instructed Uddhava (*SB* 11.20.27-29) that a devotee should continue in devotional service without becoming depressed by his inability to immediately overcome sense desire. These texts and purports are so relevant in this regard that they have been reproduced here in full.

TRANSLATION

Having awakened faith in the narrations of my glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities.

PURPORT

The beginning stage of pure devotional service is described here by the Lord. A sincere devotee has practically seen that all material activities lead only to sense gratification and all sense gratification leads only to misery. Thus a devotee's sincere desire is to engage twenty-four hours a day in the loving service of Lord Kṛṣṇa without any personal motivation. The devotee sincerely desires to be established in his constitutional position as the Lord's eternal servitor, and he prays to the Lord to elevate him to this exalted position. The word *anīśvara* indicates that because of one's past sinful activities and bad habits one may not immediately be able to completely extinguish the enjoying spirit. The Lord here encourages such a devotee not to be overly depressed or morose but to remain enthusiastic and to go on with his loving service. The word *nirviṇṇa* indicates that a sincere devotee, although somewhat entangled in the remnants of sense gratification, is completely disgusted with material life and under no circumstances willingly commits sinful activities. In fact, he avoids every kind of materialistic activity. The word *kāmān* basically refers to sex attraction and its by-products in the form of children, home and so forth. Within the material world, the sex impulse is so strong that even a sincere candidate in the loving service of the Lord may sometimes be disturbed by sex attraction or by lingering sentiments for wife and children. A pure devotee certainly feels spiritual affection for all living entities, including the so-called

wife and children, but he knows that material bodily attraction leads to no good, for it simply entangles one and one's so-called relatives in a miserable chain reaction of fruitive activities. The word *dṛḍha-niścaya* ("steadfast conviction") indicates that in any circumstance a devotee is completely determined to go on with his prescribed duties for Kṛṣṇa. Thus he thinks, "By my previous shameful life my heart is polluted with many illusory attachments. Personally I have no power to stop them. Only Lord Kṛṣṇa within my heart can remove such inauspicious contamination. But whether the Lord removes such attachments immediately or lets me go on being afflicted by them, I will never give up my devotional service to Him. Even if the Lord places millions of obstacles in my path, and even if because of my offenses I go to hell, I will never for a moment stop serving Lord Kṛṣṇa. I am not interested in mental speculation and fruitive activities; even if Lord Brahmā personally comes before me offering such engagements, I will not be even slightly interested. Although I am attached to material things I can see very clearly that they lead to no good because they simply give me trouble and disturb my devotional service to the Lord. Therefore, I sincerely repent my foolish attachments to so many material things, and I am patiently awaiting Lord Kṛṣṇa's mercy."

The word *prīta* indicates that a devotee feels exactly like the son or subject of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and is very attached to his relationship with the Lord. Therefore, although sincerely lamenting occasional lapses into sense enjoyment, he never gives up his enthusiasm to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa. If a devotee becomes too morose or discouraged in devotional service, he may drift into an impersonal consciousness or give up his devotional service to the Lord. Therefore, the Lord here advises that although one should sincerely repent, he should not become chronically depressed. One should understand that because of his past sins he must occasionally suffer disturbances from the material mind and senses, but one should not therefore become a devotee of detachment, as do the speculative philosophers. Although one may desire detachment to purify one's devotional service to the Lord, if one becomes more concerned with renunciation than with acting for the pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa, he is misunderstanding the position of loving devotional service. Faith in Lord Kṛṣṇa is so powerful that in due course of time it will automatically award detachment and perfect knowledge. If one gives up Lord Kṛṣṇa as the central object of one's worship and concentrates more on knowledge and detachment, one will become deviated from one's progress in going back home,

back to Godhead. A sincere devotee of the Lord must be sincerely convinced that simply by the strength of devotional service and the mercy of Lord Kṛṣṇa he will achieve everything auspicious in life. One must believe that Lord Kṛṣṇa is all-merciful and that He is the only real goal of one's life. Such determined faith combined with a sincere desire to give up sense enjoyment will carry one past the obstacles of this world.

The words *jāta-śraddhaḥ mat-kathāsu* are most significant here. By faithful hearing of the mercy and glories of the Lord one will gradually be freed from all material desire and clearly see at every moment the utter frustration of sense gratification. Chanting the glories of the Lord with firm faith and conviction is a tremendously powerful spiritual process that enables one to give up all material association.

There is actually nothing inauspicious in the devotional service of the Lord. Occasional difficulties experienced by a devotee are due to his previous material activities. On the other hand, the endeavor for sense gratification is completely inauspicious. Thus sense gratification and devotional service are directly opposed to each other. In all circumstances one should therefore remain the Lord's sincere servant, always believing in His mercy. Then one will certainly go back home, back to Godhead.

TRANSLATION

When an intelligent person engages constantly in worshipping Me through loving devotional service as described by Me, his heart becomes firmly situated in Me. Thus all material desires within the heart are destroyed.

PURPORT

The material senses are engaged in gratifying the concoctions of the mind, causing many types of material desires to become prominent, one after another. One who constantly engages in the devotional service of the Lord by hearing and chanting the Lord's transcendental glories with firm faith gets relief from the harassment of material desires. By serving the Lord one becomes strengthened in the conviction that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the only actual enjoyer and all others are meant to share the Lord's pleasure through devotional service. A devotee of the Lord situates Śrī Kṛṣṇa on a beautiful throne within his heart and there offers the Lord constant service. Just as the rising sun gradually eliminates all trace of darkness, the Lord's presence within the heart causes all material desires there to weaken and eventually disappear.

The words *mayi hṛdi sthite* ("when the heart is situated in Me") indicate that an advanced devotee sees Lord Kṛṣṇa not only within his own heart but within the hearts of all living creatures. Thus a sincere devotee who chants and hears the glories of Śrī Kṛṣṇa should not be discouraged by the remnants of material desires within the heart. He should faithfully wait for the devotional process to naturally purify the heart of all contamination.

The above texts refer to devotees who are fixed in their devotional determination, yet still subject to disturbance. Those who are more neophyte and agitated may try to forcibly suppress their desires. However, such a process cannot ultimately be successful, for desires cannot be overcome unless they are purified. Like pressing on a bump in a carpet, a suppressed desire simply comes up elsewhere. A *brahmacārī* struggling with sex desire may not like to admit his predicament even to himself. But if he clearly has problems with gluttony, anger, or other contaminations, he should know it to be the same enemy—sex desire—manifesting in a different way. It is best for such a *brahmacārī* to admit his difficulty and face up to it with intelligence. Biting the teeth and straining to hold on eventually leads to collapse.

Devotees who feel excessively agitated, whose minds are always disturbed by lusty desires, had better consult a senior devotee for help. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī recommends in his *Upadeśāmṛta* that devotees reveal their minds in confidence to others. Discussing spiritual difficulties with advanced devotees helps in overcoming them.

We should know that there is no easy way out. You can't just take a pill to stop sex desire. There is no instant *mantra, tantra, yantra, kavaca,* or astrological stone that makes material desires vanish. And although mechanical means, such as restricting association with women and dietary control, will help, the real magic formula is Kṛṣṇa consciousness, pure devotional service.

kecit kevalayā bhaktyā
vāsudeva-parāyaṇāḥ
aghaṁ dhunvanti kārtsnyena
nīhāram iva bhāskaraḥ

"Only a rare person who has adopted complete, unalloyed devotional service to Kṛṣṇa can uproot the weeds of sinful actions with no possibility that they will revive. He can do this by discharging devotional service, just as the sun can

immediately dissipate fog by its rays." (*SB* 6.1.15)
Śrīla Prabhupāda: "Why are you induced by sex life? Stop it by Kṛṣṇa consciousness. If you devote your whole life in Kṛṣṇa consciousness you will not be agitated by any sex life. If one is actually advanced in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he will deride, 'Huh! Nonsense! What is this?' That is Kṛṣṇa conscious advancement. The only remedy is Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Conversation, 28/05/74)
There is no other solution. We have to apply ourselves to Kṛṣṇa consciousness very seriously, and when Kṛṣṇa sees our sincerity He will bless us, and gradually all these dirty things will go away. As Śrīla Prabhupāda replied when asked what to do about lust, "You have to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, otherwise there is no solution to this problem." (-The devotee who asked was Dīna Bandhu dāsa.) "It is only by the grace of the Supreme Lord that one can be protected from the allurement of lusty material desires. The Lord gives protection to devotees who are always engaged in His transcendental loving service." (*SB* 3.12.32)
As stated by Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, *kāma kṛṣṇa-karmārpaṇe:* lusty desires should be redirected towards the service of Kṛṣṇa. This is practical. A devotee who develops the desire to please Kṛṣṇa, and is constantly absorbed in His service, automatically overcomes material lust.
To maintain a constant service mood requires the steadiness of the mode of goodness. Steady *brahmacarya* is also possible only for those on the platform of goodness. *Ati-brahmacarya,* "extreme *brahmacarya*" may be manifested as artificial austerities or misogyny, but these are symptoms of the mode of passion.
It is a common misconception that lust can be conquered by being nasty to women, but traditional *brahmacārī* training is to learn to respect women. For a person brought up in lust, ugly passions will arise whenever he sees a beautiful young woman. But the sight of the same woman will arouse a respectful feeling for a mother in the heart of a person who has been trained properly. One who feels reverence for women, considering them as mothers, cannot lust after them or want to exploit them.
The tendency for the mind to sink to the lowest depths can be overcome by bringing it to the highest level. Instead of thinking of exploiting the bodies of others by sex life, a *brahmacārī* should meditate on how to bestow the topmost benefit upon all by preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A *brahmacārī* sees the body

of a woman as an allurement of *māyā*, but also sees a soul within crying out for Kṛṣṇa.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura states that material desires become insignificant if one gets the mercy of Lord Nityānanda. Lord Nityānanda was ordered by Lord Caitanya to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness to all classes of men, even to the most fallen, which he did under the most difficult circumstances by exhibiting the greatest humility. So if we take on difficulties in preaching service, praying for Lord Nityānanda's mercy, surely He will help us.

Some new devotees experience that they feel more sexual agitation after coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness than they did before! Philosophically we can understand that it was not that the devotee was more pure before coming to Kṛṣṇa, but that the stockpile of dormant material desires within the heart has become manifested. (*SB* 4.29.69) When a room is cleaned after a long time, all the dust and dirt which was hidden in dark corners comes out. On initial cleaning, the room actually seems to become more dirty. The fact is that the room was full of dirt before, but because there was no proper attempt to clean it, the dirt remained unnoticed. But the end result is that the room becomes clean in a way that it never was before—not superficially, but completely. Similarly, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa cleans the mirror of the heart. When material desires come out, go on chanting. If the heart is very dirty, the cleansing process may be long and difficult. But the end result, maybe after much endeavor, will be that the heart will be spotlessly clean.*

Falldown

It is very disappointing that devotees, despite professing high ideals, sometimes deviate from the regulative principles, especially by falling into illicit sex. When devotees fall down, especially senior devotees, it causes great disturbance. Of course, that tendency is there in the conditioned souls. Before engagement in sense gratification comes contemplation of the act, which is developed from the seed of sinful desire in the mind. These unwanted desires arise out of the subconsciousness like bubbles surfacing from the bottom of a pond. The expert transcendentalist is adept at ignoring these grotesque

thoughts and letting them die. If they are fed, they will grow bigger and bigger and eventually devour the aspiring yogi. Externally a devotee may act as if strong but if internally he harbors desires, then when an opportunity arises to fulfill those desires, the internal is likely to become external.

Even for a devotee seriously trying to lead a pure life, it is not surprising if he is attacked by gross desires, because it is the business of *māyā* to disturb him. The modern age is especially difficult for *brahmacārīs*, because even while walking on the street they will see so many dressed-up women, cinema advertisements, and billboards, all specifically designed to invoke lusty desires. Modern cities throng with thousands of women trying to outdo each other in being provocative. Traditionally, *brahmacārīs* would keep their eyes downcast while walking on a public path, so as to avoid seeing the distractions of *māyā*. This may not be practical in today's cities, but still *brahmacārīs* have to be very careful to control their eyes while moving in *māyā's* kingdom. It is not surprising if the mind becomes agitated, but if a *brahmacārī* persistently cannot control his mind, he had better get married before he falls down into illicit sex.

A gross falldown may also happen accidentally, that is, without previous contemplation. Unexpectedly, a devotee may find himself in a situation where *māyā* is presenting herself to him, and due to insufficient spiritual strength he succumbs. Therefore a *brahmacārī* is cautious at every step of his life, so as to avoid danger. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī has cautioned devotees not to fall into "the whirlpools of unfortunate situations. If one falls into such positions, he is finished." (*Cc. Madhya* 25.279) However, we also have to preach in this most contaminated world. Therefore we should always stay tight in the association of devotees, and keep strong by hearing and chanting with full attention. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "If you chant always Hare Kṛṣṇa, read my books, and preach this philosophy sincerely, then Kṛṣṇa will provide you with all facility, and you will not fall down into material entanglement." (-Letter to San Francisco devotees, 30/03/67)

For preaching we must take risks, but not to the extent that our minds become greatly agitated. We must know the limits of our strength in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and work within those limits. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "That is our real mission, to deliver the world by preaching Kṛṣṇa's message to others, but even higher realization, the highest realization, is to save oneself." (Letter, 09/01/73)

However, an inadvertent, temporary fall down is not a disqualification for devotional service—Kṛṣṇa forgives. The devotee must pick himself up quickly and carry on. But we must know that falldowns, even mental, are damaging to our devotional service. If there is no attempt for rectification, we can expect Kṛṣṇa to reciprocate such insincerity by withdrawing His mercy. Thus the privilege of devotional service is lost.

Masturbation

In our endeavor to become Kṛṣṇa conscious, *māyā* is always trying to knock us back. Even for a sincere devotee who has made considerable progress, *māyā* doesn't hesitate to use her lowest and grossest weapon: sex. Sometimes devotees—even responsible devotees who have no intentions of physically engaging in illicit sex—become weak. On lying down, they submit to the mad mind, and even against their own will (*Bg.* 3.36) indulge in mental fantasies and masturbation.

This is a difficult problem, especially if it becomes a habit. If this contemplation is not stopped at an early stage, then it will likely go from thinking, to feeling, to willingly engaging in sex. Such a person usually ends up getting married, or worse, falls into illicit sex and becomes a debaucher. A devotee with this habit will always feel guilty, and may literally go crazy. Guilty feelings sometimes impel a devotee to hide this problem from those who care about his devotional advancement. However, to rectify this faulty mentality requires confidential counseling from one's guru, local authority, or any other trusted devotee.

Admitting to this takes courage and can understandably be embarrassing. But if a devotee suffering from this malady is at all to overcome it, he must seek advice from a senior devotee who he can completely trust. Particularly, the spiritual master is the topmost well-wisher of the disciple, so no *anarthas* should be kept secret from him if the disciple really wants to weed them out for good.

However, even with the best of help, it may not be easy to overcome this painful predicament. The only real solution is to surrender to Kṛṣṇa. "This

divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But one who has surrendered to Me can easily cross beyond it." (*Bg.* 7.14) We have to take shelter of Madana-mohana (See lengthy quote from Prabhupāda lecture in "Overcoming Sex Desire").

Take heart though, for "Impossible is a word in a fool's dictionary." (Conversation, 27/06/75) With sincere endeavor and the help of others this degrading habit can be broken.

A practical tip to Kṛṣṇa-ize the mind at night is to read the Kṛṣṇa book with devotees before retiring, and thus go to sleep thinking of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Some devotees go to sleep listening to a cassette of Prabhupāda's transcendental voice purifying their mind.

In the following letter, Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to be addressing this problem: "You are finding some difficulty with sex desire and have asked guidance from me to instruct you how to handle this problem of the material body. First of all I think you should know that such problems are not very unnatural because in the body the conditioned soul is very prone to failure. But also we must remember that such failure will not discourage us from executing the most important mission of our life, to become fully Kṛṣṇa conscious. So whatever fall down has been, you should be regretful about it, but it is not so serious nor is it a permanent disqualification. But you must try to check yourself from such artificial things and take full shelter of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. I think that for such checking, marriage is the only solution. It is understood that everyone has some nasty habits, but by sticking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, chanting our required rounds loudly, and tending the Deities, these items will surely save you. So always be seriously engaged in serving Kṛṣṇa and pray to Kṛṣṇa to help you with your frailties. But I think that marriage is the solution with no other alternative. If you are married you can continue to practice all the items of worship and with more peace of mind, so such solution, along with redoubled efforts to serve nicely and be very pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, these things will help you. It is my open advice for everyone that one who is disturbed by sex must take the responsibility of married life." (Letter, 09/12/68)

Homosexuality

Neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality are "natural." Heterosexual desire is a perverted reflection of our original love for Kṛṣṇa and homosexuality is another twist. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane man in the ordinary course of life." (*SB* 3.20.26)

Due to the influence of Kali-yuga, homosexuality is now a common problem. As Kali-yuga advances we will have to accommodate more and more people with past perverse lives and give them the opportunity for purification. If homosexuals sincerely come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, what advice should we give them?

In the Vedic culture, heterosexual desires can be accommodated within the *gṛhastha-āśrama,* but there is no scope for accommodating homosexual desires. Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended marriage (to a woman!) for a disciple with homosexual desires. This advice may not seem very practical, for the homosexual's attraction is to men rather than women. But homosexual or heterosexual, the disease is lust. Homosexuality means that the lust has increased to an abnormally high degree. Marriage means to channel that lust in a manner acceptable within the Vedic culture.

Anyway, homosexuals coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness will need special guidance from senior devotees. The homosexual must be understood as an individual person and be given proper facility after frank discussion. He should understand his condition to be especially fallen, but should be confident that by Kṛṣṇa consciousness, all difficulties can be overcome. And other devotees should be sympathetic and understanding with such sincere souls.

As with any conditioned soul accepted for devotional service, sheltering homosexuals in the *āśrama* is a risk. As with a heterosexual, we shall first have to see if a homosexual is sufficiently self-controlled before he may be allowed to stay in the *āśrama*, remembering that, whereas heterosexual *brahmacārīs* are sheltered from the objects of their attraction in the *brahmacārī-āśrama*, the homosexual is surrounded by them. We must be compassionate, but we cannot sacrifice our standards of purity.

Preaching About Celibacy

Preaching to nondevotees should generally not be about celibacy, but about the need to become Kṛṣṇa conscious. If they take up Kṛṣṇa consciousness then everything else will follow. Newcomers to Kṛṣṇa consciousness are sometimes discouraged by so many restrictions, especially those on sex. They should be encouraged to chant, take *prasāda,* and associate with devotees. If they want sex life, that is not forbidden—in the *gṛhastha-āśrama.* On the other hand, if a young man is ready to be a *brahmacārī,* by all means encourage him.

At least among committed devotees, preaching about celibacy must go on. Śrīla Prabhupāda: "The whole world is engaging in this vagina problem. These things should be regularly discussed. This is *kīrtana.* If these things are not discussed in our movement, then everything will grow weak. There should be one class after another. Everything is in the books." (-Told by Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī)

It is undoubtedly difficult to promote celibacy in a world atmosphere where everything is related to sex and women. The whole world today is absorbed in gross sense gratification, of which the ultimate expression is sex. Moreover, so-called scientists and doctors openly state that losing semen is not harmful to health.

If people ask why we are celibate, we can explain to them that it is a prerequisite for self-realization. The mind must be controlled, but it never can be if it is agitated by sex indulgence. One cannot be a transcendentalist, whether a yogi, *jñānī,* or devotee, without being celibate. (*Bg.* 6.14 purport)

Celibacy has been accepted by priests and monks in leading Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian traditions since time immemorial. Jesus, Buddha, Śaṅkarācārya, and countless others accepted the vow of celibacy. Celibacy is not an old-fashioned, cranky idea, but a dynamic, vital principle for achieving a success so sublime that ordinary people cannot conceive of it at all.

Furthermore, the practice of celibacy has not been limited to the sphere of religion. As Dr. R.W. Bernard notes in his book *Science Discovers the Physiological Value of Continence*: (-1957, Health Research Labs, Mokelumne Hill, California)

"The greatest intellectual geniuses in both ancient and modern times led continent lives, and there is yet to be recorded one individual who freely expended seminal fluid who ever amounted to anything. In most cases, individuals who have achieved have been forced by necessity to abstain from sexual indulgence, as Cervantes, who wrote Don Quixote while in prison, or

Dante who wrote his Divine Comedy while in exile. Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* when blind and when he did not indulge in sex. Sir Isaac Newton, active in intellect until the age of 80, led a continent life from birth, and so did Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, both of whom retained their creative genius (until) an advanced age."

Other famous celibates include Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Beethoven, and Herbert Spencer. Many other philosophers, artists, and scientists have preferred to sublimate the sex drive so as to increase their creativity and concentrate their energy on intellectual pursuits.

This stands as evidence against the standard Freudian objection that celibates become frustrated and should therefore be allowed to indulge.* It is true that restricting the body without being able to control the mind could lead to psychosis. Without developing a higher consciousness, celibacy will be torture. But many non-celibates also suffer frustration, anxiety, or physical disease, caused directly or indirectly by sex. Celibate or non-celibate, the real problem is sex.

Furthermore, those with knowledge of the laws of karma understand that indulgence in sex entangles the conditioned souls ever more deeply in material bondage. The ultimate solution, then, is neither to accept nor reject sex, but to rise above it altogether to come to the spiritual platform. A fully Kṛṣṇa conscious person can be fully celibate or can have a dozen children, but either way his consciousness is never contaminated. But for the neophyte transcendentalist, sexual agitation is a major disturbance in his meditation on the Absolute Truth.

Therefore, aspiring devotees who are capable of doing so are advised to remain completely celibate—if they can control their minds. Otherwise, devotees may get married and engage in restricted sex during part of their lives.

Nevertheless, sex is risky. Even within marriage, if sex is engaged in at the wrong time, in the wrong place, in the wrong consciousness, or without having undergone the required purificatory rituals, both man and woman become punishable by the laws of nature. Yet the pushing of sex desire is so strong that, even knowing all this, we become impelled to commit sinful acts. *Kāma eṣa krodha eṣa*. Therefore it is best to remain *brahmacārīs*, strictly avoiding contact with women so as not to be victimized.

Devotees must be convinced of the necessity of sense control. We must know that sense control is in our real self-interest. Without becoming free from

sense gratification, especially sex, no one can achieve perfection in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *Brahmacarya* is that essential training and practice in sense control and detachment, through which perfection is finally attained. We must be determined to follow the principles of *brahmacarya*, otherwise we cannot make any progress.

In preaching, another approach is to explain the deleterious effects of sex, animal slaughter, gambling, and intoxication on society. Crime, war, floods, droughts, famine, cancer, AIDS, and multifarious other problems are scourging the world. Learned professors write big scholarly treatises suggesting how to overcome the problems, but the problems remain. People do not know that they are reaping the poisonous harvest of sinful activities, especially of cow killing and illicit sex. However, even a hundred years ago, sense control was considered a virtue and excessive sense indulgence a vice.

It was only after "Man from monkeys" Darwin and "Let loose" Freud that the old barriers collapsed. Free sex flourished. Gradually, divorce, "living together," unmarried mothers, birth control, abortion, and homosexuality—all formerly banned and considered despicable—became socially acceptable. Nowadays austerity for spiritual advancement is considered despicable. The resultant society is a disaster, and getting worse. Now even child abuse and incest have become everyday affairs. The materialists express their horror, but probably after some time they will legalize and encourage these types of sinful activities as well.

It is quite possible because the whole society is made up of *varṇa-saṅkara*—children begotten in lust. John Lennon observed that, "Most children are born over a bottle of whisky on Saturday night." The degraded consciousness of such unwanted by-products is unimaginable. Born in the mode of ignorance, they are totally blind to the necessity of sense control. They are constantly involved in all kinds of abominable activities, considering them quite normal, and never for a moment imagine that the reactions to sinful activity are the cause of all chaos in human society.

Staying brahmacārī

If one can stay a *brahmacārī* without being unduly agitated by sex desire, that is by far the best situation from which to aim at going back to Godhead. Without the heavy burden of family responsibilities, the distractions of social life, and the ever-present opportunity for sense gratification, the *brahmacārī* can live simply and peacefully and dedicate his whole life and energy to understanding Kṛṣṇa. Without having to cater to the expectations of often-materialistic relatives, his only obligation is to please his guru, Hari, and the Vaiṣṇavas. No need to get a job, no need to get a home, no need to go shopping for saris—simple, easy, and nice. So even if there is some difficulty or occasional mental agitation, if you can at all do it, stay *brahmacārī!* Avoid family life! Just see the example of Nārada Muni and the Haryaśvas. (*SB* Canto 6, Chapter 5)

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "*Brahmacārī* life is the easiest *āśrama* to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness from. So little is required. A little *prasāda.* A little service. And six feet of space to lay down your head at night and rest so you can continue to serve guru and Kṛṣṇa another day." (Told by Praghoṣa dāsa)

"A *gṛhastha* has many responsibilities. A *brahmacārī* has no responsibility. His only responsibility is to serve Kṛṣṇa. The real business of human life is to take the responsibility of spiritual advancement. So if one remains *brahmacārī*, he has no disturbance in that responsibility. But if he becomes a *gṛhastha*, disturbance is there. You cannot take wholeheartedly the spiritual responsibility." (Conversation, 11/08/76)

Opting to remain celibate is a great decision. It is called *bṛhad-vrata* ("the great vow of perpetual celibacy"), for it is not at all easy to follow. Mahājana Bhīṣmadeva was awarded his name (meaning "terrible") by the demigods upon his adopting this vow, (*Mahābhārata, Ādi-parva)* for it is indeed a very difficult task to undertake. But for those who adhere firmly to this vow, it practically guarantees liberation. (*SB* 11.17.36)

Brahmacarya is a lonely path followed by only a few, and rarely understood or appreciated. Those who decide to remain lifelong celibates may have to face doubts expressed by those who believe such a determination to be impossible to keep. And considering that several apparently stalwart devotees have fallen into the clutches of women, it may well seem impractical for others to try to maintain such rigid vows. However, the failure or setback of some does not portend failure for all. Although throughout history some renunciates have fallen victim to woman, yet others have resisted female charms and thus gone

on to achieve perfection. Our *ācāryas* have never stopped encouraging devotees to aspire for the highest ideal despite the inevitability that some will slip along the way. That most *brahmacārīs* eventually marry certainly does not mean that those determined to remain celibate cannot succeed.

Seriously committed *brahmacārīs* try to avoid the unnecessary entanglement of family life by dedicating their lives to guru and Kṛṣṇa. Even if householders are doubtful about the chances of such *brahmacārīs* surviving, they need not cynically and unnecessarily try to break the spirit and enthusiasm of *brahmacārīs* by telling them that they are fighting a hopeless battle. Such discouraging words may be due to enviousness on the part of such householders, who take perverse pleasure in prodding *brahmacārīs* to totter and fall.

Sometimes *brahmacārīs* are accused of hypocrisy: that for all their caution in dealing with women, they are not free from sex desire, and should therefore just get married. However, it is understood that the *brahmacārī* is not free from sex desire. If he were, he would not be in this material world. Nevertheless, he is following the path by which sex desire is overcome. It is not an easy path, and may take many years of careful practice to become perfect. That a *brahmacārī* still has sex desire is not an indictment, nor does it mean that he must get married. That he is committed to fight against *māyā* is praiseworthy, even if his progress is slow. Of course, those whose minds constantly dwell on sex are not *brahmacārīs* at all and have no business being in that *āśrama*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: "My open advice is that if any one can remain a *brahmacārī*, it is very nice, but there is no need of artificial *brahmacārīs*. In *Bhagavad-gītā* it is stated that one who exhibits outwardly as self-restrained, but inwardly he thinks of sense gratification, he is condemned as a false pretender. We do not want any false pretenders in numbers, but we want a single sincere soul." (Letter, 02/02/70)

The relevant verse is *Gītā* 3.6: "One who restrains the senses of action but whose mind dwells on sense objects certainly deludes himself and is called a pretender."

Those who unnecessarily scorn the glorious *brahmacārī-āśrama* like to cite this verse. However, the next verse of *Gītā* (3.7) describes actual *brahmacārīs*: "On the other hand, if a sincere person tries to control the active senses by the mind and begins *karma-yoga* (in Kṛṣṇa consciousness) without attachment, he is by far superior." Kṛṣṇa here speaks of controlling the senses by the mind.

Those *brahmacārīs* who try to control the senses by force, by accepting a regimen of severe austerities, almost always fail and collapse miserably into sense gratification. Those who are naturally averse to sense indulgence, for whom living without comforts is pleasurable, who do not have to be coaxed into *sādhana* and service, are more suited for staying *brahmacārī.*

Such level-headed *brahmacārīs* try to control the active senses by the mind by applying in life what they have heard from *śāstra.* Those who can come to the platform of realization simply by hearing are most likely to remain *brahmacārīs* for life, whereas those who do not realize what they hear will have to make their own experiences in the *gṛhastha-āśrama.*

Those intending to remain lifelong *brahmacārīs* should particularly read and discuss those portions from *śāstra* that emphasize the value of remaining free from sex. (The second part of this book provides a comprehensive reader.)

Śāstric descriptions of sexual entanglement are unreservedly factual and strong, and are welcomed by renunciates who want to break their material attachments. Those who want to maintain such attachments may dislike such descriptions, but that is simply their misfortune. Those who become enlivened by such strong statements are fit candidates for trying to remain as *brahmacārīs.* Those who become discouraged, thinking the challenge to overcome sexual attraction to be too tough, are not going to make it.

Notwithstanding the opinions of others, the lifelong *brahmacārī* goes on hearing and discussing such descriptions so as to maintain sharp spiritual intelligence. He must be firmly convinced that material life is no better than a ditch into which people pass stool. He does not feel *brahmacarya* to be an oppressively difficult struggle, but counts his blessings daily for remaining safe from family life.

The lifelong *brahmacārī* must have a positive, hopeful outlook, born of faith in Kṛṣṇa. Those with a critical, negative mentality cannot remain *brahmacārī.*

The lifelong *brahmacārī* also has to develop an inner toughness and self-sufficiency. He maintains his determination even in non-ideal circumstances such as getting little personal association with advanced Vaiṣṇavas. His inner resolve is that of a *sannyāsī*, although he has not formally accepted that role. That resolve is to do whatever is necessary to make sure this is his last birth in the material world.

A *brahmacārī* who wants to remain as such has to understand that there will always be women in this world, that he cannot run away from the world, and

that he must therefore adjust his consciousness to be absorbed in Kṛṣṇa. *Brahme carati iti brahmacarya.* Avoidance of women can be practiced to a certain extent, but the real avoidance is to not let the mind indulge in thoughts of sense enjoyment. To one who is actually enjoying *brahma-sukha* (spiritual happiness), the question, "Should I get married or not?" will hardly enter his head, and if it does, he immediately rejects it without dwelling on it or being disturbed by it.

Along with the great endeavor to conquer sex desire, devotees who want to stay *brahmacārī* must cultivate a mood of selflessness. Most householders are practically compelled to give more importance to their immediate familial duties than to the mission of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The *brahmacārī's* freedom from such obligations is not meant for living a foppish, lazy life but for cultivating selflessness in the service of Kṛṣṇa and his devotees. This is a vital key to staying *brahmacārī.* A so-called *brahmacārī* who is selfish and attached should get realistic and get married.

Simply a show of *brahmacarya* is not sufficient, nor can it last. *Brahmacarya* means *brahme carati*, not "nonsense *carati*." A nonsense person dressed in saffron is not a *brahmacārī.* A real *brahmacārī* is absorbed in service, and is surrendered and determined. "*Brahmacārī* means strictly following." (Lecture, 05/04/74) "*Brahmacārī* life can be continued only by deep absorption in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Letter, 31/12/68) "*Brahmacārī* means don't be attached. If you can, avoid all this nonsense. That is *brahmacārī.* Try to avoid, better. If not, enter (family life)." (Lecture, 03/05/73) Those who are not fully into it are in the wrong *āśrama.* Better they go home and become honest householders, rather than making a show of renunciation that they are not fit for.

"Renunciation is not cheap, but has to be pursued as a lifelong plan. Within this plan, discretion is the better part of valor. Lord Caitanya cautioned the young Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī that the ocean of material existence is very wide and not easily crossed. Just by impetuously jumping into the ocean and making a few mad strokes, we cannot expect to reach Kṛṣṇaloka." (Satsvarūpa dāsa Gosvāmī)

Some unmarried devotees are clearly unfit for remaining *brahmacārīs.* Those who are not very serious about spiritual life, or who are strongly inclined towards sense gratification, or whose minds are so agitated that they often become upset even over trifles, are obviously in the wrong *āśrama.* They are not to be condemned, for everyone is at a different stage of development and

it cannot be expected that everyone will immediately take to full Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

On the other hand, those who are serious to stay *brahmacārī* should definitely be encouraged to do so, and not just married off for the sake of expediency. Our movement needs many examples of devotees who have stuck to Kṛṣṇa consciousness staunchly without feeling the need for increased sense gratification. Later on some of the most exemplary long-term *brahmacārīs* may take *sannyāsa.*

Sannyāsa means to be finished with sex life forever, to be saved from family life and to save others from family life. *Sannyāsīs* give the greatest service to humanity by traveling everywhere and preaching the message of Kṛṣṇa unrestrictedly. The *sannyāsa-āśrama* is the ideal for the other three *āśramas,* which are all meant to lead one to this fourth, crest-jewel of all *āśramas.*

Traditionally, *brahmacārīs* act as assistants to *sannyāsīs,* so to serve and take the association of *sannyāsīs* will definitely be a great help for remaining a *brahmacārī.*

However, it is not that after several years a *brahmacārī* necessarily has to opt either for householder life or *sannyāsa.* The *brahmacārī-āśrama* is not just for children. Many spiritual institutions in India have senior *brahmacārīs* who are highly respected for their spiritual qualities. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote that *brahmacārī* and *sannyāsa* life are in essence the same and that it was therefore not necessary for every *brahmacārī* to take *sannyāsa.* (See Letter, 05/06/74)

Indeed, in many ways the *brahmacārī-āśrama* is the best for spiritual advancement and developing Vaiṣṇava qualities. It facilitates the essential quality of humility, for the *brahmacārī* has neither the possessions of a *gṛhastha* nor the status of a *sannyāsī*, both of which can foster false pride. *Brahmacārī* life is generally considerably more simple and austere than that of *sannyāsīs* in the modern day. *Brahmacārīs* can remain less entangled than *sannyāsīs* in the social affairs of householders, who prefer to go to *sannyāsīs* for blessings and advice, and who like to call *sannyāsīs* to their homes and feed them. The *brahmacārī-āśrama* is also intrinsically the best for nurturing surrender to guru.

Therefore, more important than formally taking *sannyāsa* is the firm decision to stay *brahmacārī*, with determination never to engage in sex life again. With such a conviction, a *brahmacārī* practices Kṛṣṇa consciousness with deep faith and commitment. If one wants to stay *brahmacārī,* a whimsical approach will

not do. What is required is firm, steady service; regular, potent *sādhana;* and a deep vision of Kṛṣṇa consciousness acquired from intensive study of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

And If Your Are Thinking About Getting Married...

If you are thinking about getting married, stop it. Much better just to remain *brahmacārī.* If all you've heard about getting married doesn't help you understand that you shouldn't, read on. (It would have been nicer not to have such a section in this book. But many *brahmacārīs* eventually get married, and some guidance is needed for them.)

Having received the great benediction of a human birth, and the even more rarely achieved gift of association with devotees, we stand poised on the threshold of eternity. Will we be intelligent enough to perfect our lives by fully surrendering to Kṛṣṇa, or will we have to come back again to taste the bitter fruits of material life?

We want Kṛṣṇa. That's why we have taken to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But to get Kṛṣṇa, the supreme pure, we have to become pure. Hence, there is the process of devotional service. But it takes time. No one is becoming a pure devotee overnight. We want Kṛṣṇa, but we are held back by multifarious material desires, especially the powerful sex urge, which haunts us like a repeating nightmare.

Therefore the Vedic social system is arranged for gradual purification. Of the four *āśramas,* three are specifically meant for renunciation. And because we conditioned souls have so many material desires, in the *gṛhastha-āśrama* scope is given for limited "enjoyment," coupled with the continuous performance of auspicious activities.

In youth the senses are very strong. A conditioned soul may be seriously seeking self-realization, but is not ready for full renunciation. He has the facility to enjoy(?) family life during early manhood, while keeping in contact with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When old age approaches he must again take up a life of penance.

Lifelong *brahmacarya* is for those *brahmacārīs* who never consider marriage as

an option. If thoughts of marriage or sex start to linger in the mind of a *brahmacārī*, if he feels dissatisfied with his status as a menial servant, or is anxious about his future security, it is an indication that he is probably in the wrong *āśrama* and should prepare himself for marriage. He should honestly face the question, "I may be able to avoid marriage now, but will I be able to remain single throughout life?"

Sometimes it is said that family life is the safe path (*SB* 3.14.20) and *brahmacarya* the easy path. *Brahmacārī* life is by nature simple and in that sense easy. Although somewhat austere, it frees its practitioners from unnecessary material entanglements and the problems that go along with them. Thus a *brahmacārī* remains largely problem-free. A genuine *brahmacārī* has few problems, and especially does not have serious mental problems. A *brahmacārī* with many problems should go to the *āśrama* for working out problems, namely the *gṛhastha-āśrama,* which is by nature full of problems. Indeed, although *brahmacārī* life is considered austere because it tends towards zero sense gratification, the difficulties a *gṛhastha* has to undergo to maintain his little sense gratification are often more than those a *brahmacārī* voluntarily accepts.

Thus the *gṛhastha-āśrama* is said to be safe but problematic, whereas the *brahmacārī-āśrama* is relatively problem-free but can be risky. But in another way the *brahmacārī* is more safe, because he has no opportunity to indulge in sex, whereas a householder may do so at any time. The safety of a householder is that if he is going to indulge in sex, he may do so licitly with his wife, whereas a *brahmacārī* who fails to control his senses can only do so illicitly. *Brahmacārī* life is safe, then, only if the *brahmacārī* is sufficiently controlled to be a real *brahmacārī*. If he is too much agitated by lusty desires, he is unsafe in the *brahmacārī-āśrama*, and should become safe by entering householder life. However, it is naive to think that getting married is a cure for sex desire. It's not that easy. Rather, those who are not self-controlled within marriage increase their attachment for sex by indulging in it. Thus, the safety of family life is not without its perils, and is hard-earned.

The best practice of *brahmacarya*, therefore, is to persevere and remain free from sex. It is not necessary or compulsory that everyone get married. But for one who cannot maintain the firm determination to stay *brahmacārī,* and is agitated so severely by material desires that he cannot concentrate properly on service, it may be better for him to get married and be done with it rather than

totter on the mental platform indefinitely. An unsteady *brahmacārī* can battle on and try to become more fixed, but unless he soon does so, it may be difficult for him to avoid marriage.

From the philosophical standpoint, for a *brahmacārī* to marry doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. The purpose of this movement is to get disentangled from the material world, so to deliberately get re-entangled appears to be self-defeating.

Of course, getting married is not an offense, and is a reality for most devotees. But a would-be *gṛhastha* should know what he is getting into. Marriage is often approached whimsically, without enough serious consideration and preparation. It is better to be informed about the responsibilities of married life, and to have a clear picture of what lies ahead after marriage.

Brahmacārīs should have a mature and proper understanding of what being a *gṛhastha* means. Otherwise, they may have a romantic misconception of the *gṛhastha-āśrama*, which is actually based on the commitment to responsibly maintain a Kṛṣṇa conscious family. *Brahmacārīs* contemplating marriage should carefully study Śrīla Prabhupāda's extensive instructions on *gṛhastha* duties, so as not to be bewildered on this point.

Brahmacārīs in the illusion that family life is nice are advised to read "The Forest of Material Enjoyment." (*SB* Canto 5, Chapters 13 and 14)

Unfortunately, the power of *māyā* is such that even upon reading such descriptions of the horrors of family life, those who are inclined towards it think that such descriptions are exaggerated, or would not apply in their case. Be warned: When the scriptures describe the miseries of family life, it is not just theoretical or in reference to mundane marriages only. Licit or illicit, the fleeting delight of sex is always accompanied by suffering. *Brahmacārī*s who doubt this may ask any sober householder what he thinks about family life. Almost all of them will advise to stay *brahmacārī* if possible.

Family life is always troublesome, and in today's unsettled and complex world, getting married is a greater risk than ever before. Marriage as an institution has suffered greatly, and devotees' marriages have been no exception.

The attempt to make family life smooth and comfortable takes up much of the time and energy of most householders, yet is nevertheless rarely achieved. The minuscule joys of family life, earned with many difficulties, increase as more children are born. To maintain a wife and family is not easy. In Kali-yuga a man who can simply maintain a wife and a family is considered to be a highly

successful person. If the wife is demanding or not very compatible with the husband, the suffering increases more and more without respite.

Therefore marriage should not be entered into lightly, but with caution, reserve, and sobriety. If a man is not prepared to take full responsibility, he shouldn't get married. Whimsically messing up peoples' lives, thinking, "Well, I'll just check it out, and if I don't like it, I'll drop it," is one of the symptoms of Kali-yuga mentioned in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* The scriptural recommendations about non-attachment are not a wholesale license for irresponsibility. Non-attachment does not mean that a husband should whimsically leave his wife (or vice versa). If they are so unattached then why did they marry in the first place?

Many ISKCON devotees have entered into marriage without the sense of commitment demanded by Vedic standards. The resultant divorce rate is even worse than that of the *karmīs*, although Śrīla Prabhupāda did not want any divorce at all. This is Kali-yuga marriage. As soon as there is a disagreement between husband and wife (as there almost inevitably will be), or if one partner finds the other not sufficiently sexually attractive, then there is separation and divorce. This continues to be a major problem within our Society and a cause of losing many devotees to *māyā.* As long as this divorce syndrome continues in ISKCON, it will be very difficult to substantiate to the world our claims of an alternative, better way of life. Devotees have to become responsible.

The father must be responsible to maintain his dependents both materially and spiritually, without abandoning them whimsically if there is some problem. But the social situation is so unstable that many materially solvent men become paupers overnight. Nor is there any guarantee that one's children are going to be serious about Kṛṣṇa consciousness—the lure of gross sense gratification has already claimed scores of ISKCON children.

The father is responsible for: seeing that the wife, children, and other dependents are properly clothed, housed, fed, and educated, and that their health needs are taken care of; arranging the marriages of the children and especially of the daughters, and, most important; ensuring they get training and guidance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

There are quite a few senior *gṛhastha* devotees whose marriages have been more or less successful, so *gṛhasthas*-to-be and newly married couples would be well advised to consult them. In any marriage the going will not always be

smooth, so if you can get some sympathetic help, take it.

Now, when to get married and how to go about it? Better not leave it too late. Marriage does not have to be a last gasp rescue attempt for an agitated wreck of a *brahmacārī*—much better if it can be planned and entered into in a sober manner. The traditional Vedic system is that at about the age of twenty, after about fifteen years in the *gurukula,* a *brahmacārī* sits with his guru to decide whether or not he should be married. Even if the guru directs him towards householder life, the *brahmacārī* may spend a few more years in the *gurukula* before getting married, without mental agitation caused by uncertainty.

Śrīla Prabhupāda recommended that men be married by 25, when in the prime of life and able to easily beget healthy children. Remember, when you get towards fifty, you will have to think about renunciation again. So by that time your first progeny should be grown up. "I understand that you do not want to get married now, but if you marry at all, you should marry now. Because after the age of 30, marriage is not so pleasing." (Letter, 08/11/68)

A *brahmacārī* who has reached his mid-thirties would be well advised to remain a life-long *brahmacārī.* Even with difficulty, if by performing humble service and by keeping strong association, he can avoid getting entangled so late in life, then that will be more suitable for spiritual life than becoming a middle-aged bridegroom.

Before getting married, however, it is best to get at least five good years in the *brahmacārī-āśrama.* A solid training in renunciation and sense control is a firm foundation for household life. When a *brahmacārī* is confident that he can remain a *brahmacārī* even when living with a woman, then he is ready to enter the *gṛhastha-āśrama.* "Remain a *brahmacārī*" means that he will continue to be attached to austerity. He will never give up chanting at least sixteen rounds, following the four regulative principles, rising early, taking only *prasāda,* etc. His unavoidably increased contact with women, money, sense gratification, and social life will not be the cause of his falldown.

Otherwise, (we've seen it happen so often) a man prematurely married fails to control his senses and tumbles into a dark well. His Kṛṣṇa consciousness becomes covered over, he loses the ability to understand what is actually beneficial for him, and his family life becomes almost exactly like that of a *karmī.*

So spend some time as a *brahmacārī.* Go through the rigors and ecstasies of book distribution, study Śrīla Prabhupāda's books conscientiously, travel,

preach, have some transcendental adventure and fun.
Then, how to go about getting a suitable partner. This should be done prudently. It is best to take a little time, and not rush into marrying. The Vedic system is that a third party arranges the marriage—the boy and girl would not even see each other till the wedding day. Moderners will protest, but the stability of arranged marriages in India is still far greater than that of "love marriages" in the West. *Brahmacārīs* whose parents are not Kṛṣṇa conscious may consult some senior *gṛhasthas* for help in arranging a suitable match. (*Sannyāsīs* and gurus should not be approached as marriage counselors; it is not meant for them.) A *brahmacārī* should not hang around the *brahmacāriṇīs* and check them out, thus encouraging looseness. Also, before marriage, the would-be husband must make adequate arrangements for income and accommodation. (Śrīla Prabhupāda has given much advice on marriage and how to enter into it in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 3, Chapters 21-24.)
Brahmacārīs should not have any stigma against *gṛhasthas* or against *brahmacārīs* planning to get married. It is not necessarily true that a *brahmacārī* is any less serious because he is thinking of entering householder life. The *brahmacārī* who can remain as a *brahmacārī* respects *brahmacārīs* who get married, knowing that their purpose is to come to the transcendental platform.
A final point: Make up your mind. Do not flip-flop, changing back and forth from saffron to white cloth like a chameleon.
Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote many letters to devotees who were considering whether or not to get married, and some quotations have been reproduced in the appendices so that devotees presently in the same predicament can take advantage of his advice.

The Author

Born of British parents in England in 1957, the author joined ISKCON in London in 1975 and was initiated in that year with the name Ilāpati dāsa, by the founder-*ācārya*, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. From 1977 to 1979 Ilapāti dāsa was based in India, mostly traveling in West

Bengal distributing Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. He then spent the following ten years helping to pioneer ISKCON's preaching in Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, and Malaysia.

In 1989 he was granted the order of *sannyāsa,* receiving the name Bhakti Vikāsa Swami, and again made his base in India. He has since traveled widely throughout the subcontinent, lecturing in English, Hindi, and Bengali. Bhakti Vikāsa Swami also preaches in other parts of the world, and continues to write books and magazine articles. His books have been translated into more than fifteen languages.